AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Jennifer Pepperell for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
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Title: The Experience of Gifted Girls Transitioning from Elementary
School to Sixth and Seventh Grade.

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            Deborah J. Rubel

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the experience of gifted girls

transitioning from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade. The current

counseling literature in this area found that gifted girls often struggle emotionally

when transitioning to sixth and seventh grade. The bulk of this literature was based on

quantitative research methods, and often on girls who were older. For the field of

counseling it is important to add literature to the field that expresses the views of girls

who are in sixth and seventh grade, and that their views are expressed qualitatively.

Qualitative research methods were utilized for this study, specifically the use of

grounded theory. Seven research participants were selected and interviewed over a

four-month period. Three of these participants were in sixth grade at the conclusion of

the study, and one was in seventh grade. Three seniors in high school were also

interviewed to provide confirming data throughout the study. The interview data was

coded and analyzed using grounded theory techniques. The major findings of this

study were that for these gifted girls transitioning from elementary school to sixth and

seventh was not as difficult as the literature had stated. With a strong sense of identity, these gifted girls were able to balance their desire to work hard academically and their interest in extra-curricular activities. In being able to balance their academic lives, they were able to make friends and build connections. The connections they made in turn contributed to their sense of self and their experiences of sixth and seventh grade. The implications of these findings are that gifted girls who have a strong sense of who they are, and a connection to others can move through this transition smoothly. For counselors working with this population it provides another understanding of the issues that face gifted girls in sixth and seventh grade.

The Experience of Gifted Girls Transitioning from Elementary School
to Sixth and Seventh Grade.

by
Jennifer Pepperell

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of
Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my
dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Jennifer Pepperell, Author

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Giftedness is an attribute often associated with success and ease of life, and a notion exists that gifted kids "have it all" (Bernal, 2003). With this association comes a general view in the field of education and counseling that everyone has gifts, and there is no reason to separate out those students who are gifted to provide them any extra services (Bernal, 2003). Researchers who specialize in working directly with gifted children hold the perspective that gifted children and adolescents have unique social and emotional issues related to their giftedness (Moon, 2002). Moon stated "The most common counseling need of this population is assistance in coping with stressors related to growing up as a gifted child in a society that does not always recognize, understand, or welcome giftedness" (p. 213).

From my own experience of being gifted, I found the typical attitude that gifted children do not need anything different to be minimizing and oppressive. The majority of my struggles were in sixth and seventh grade, and this struggle fits with the research of other gifted preadolescents (Kerr, 1994; Moon, 2002; Rimm, 2002). The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the experience of giftedness related to identity development of girls transitioning from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade.

Overview of the chapter

This chapter begins with a personal introduction regarding my experience with giftedness as I formed my identity. After a discussion of my experiences, this chapter briefly outlines the scope and need for the study and then discusses the theoretical

framework from which this study is built. Next, a description of the overall purpose of the study is provided, concluding with the rational for the use of grounded theory.

<u>Personal introduction to the topic</u>

I was identified as gifted when I was in first grade. I was disruptive in class and got into a lot trouble for doing other students' schoolwork. I remember feeling proud to be gifted and enjoyed the gifted "pull-out" classes that I attended. When I was in fourth grade, I went to a school for gifted children provided by the district. It was for fourth through sixth grades, and my experience there was tremendous. Because she had spent a year in Japan, my math teacher had us sit at desks that were on the floor, my French teacher never spoke to us in English, and my Greek Mythology teacher let us sit on the cabinets and furniture. I cannot remember my teachers' names, but I remember feeling good about being smart. Then I entered sixth grade, and everything changed. It was no longer safe to be smart, and my priorities changed in order to fit in. The reality was that I never really felt like I fit in. In high school, through all the honors and advanced placement classes, I felt unsure of myself, and most of the time, felt dumb.

My relationship to being gifted changed again as an undergraduate in college, yet again in my master's program, and continues to change as I move through my doctoral program. Once again, I feel good about being gifted and with that comes feeling good about who I am. I am also raising two daughters. My oldest is ahead of her peers, and it seems that I will be raising at least one gifted girl. How girls develop their identity has always interested me. I have often wondered about my process of identity development and how the challenges and pressure of being a gifted girl

shaped who I am today. My experience has made me curious about the process of

identity development in other gifted girls and in the related research. My observations

and experiences lead me to believe that gifted girls do develop their sense of self

differently from other children and that there is a distinct change when entering sixth

and seventh grade.

Scope of the study

Theorists in the fields of psychology and counseling have had an interest in

discovering how individuals develop their identity. Erikson, Gilligan and Kohlberg all

attempted to explain the ways in which children develop into adults (Owens, 2002).

All three provided the field with very different views of the development process. In

general, identity development is seen as a process through which people learn who

they are or develop their self-concepts (Erikson, 1950; Gilligan, Ward, Taylor &

Bardige, 1988; Owens, 2002). These theorists differ in how they understand self-

concept and identity development. This difference centers on the role of relationships

in this process. For feminist researchers, such as Gilligan, relationships are seen as

pivotal to identity development, particularly the maintenance of relationships.

There are several important relationships in a girl's life-- her friends, her

family, and school personnel. Of these relationships, friends and school have the

strongest impact as a gifted girl develops her identity (Kerr, 1994; Rimm, 2002). The

manner in which academics and social pressures influence identity development is

highly debatable, especially for gifted students. Researchers such as McCoach and

Segal (2003) found the influence of academics to be positive and for gifted students,

leads to a strong self-concept. Other researchers (Bernal, 2003; Bybee, Glick & Zigler, 1990; Jones, 2003) did not agree and found these influencers to be cofounding.

The manner in which gifted girls are socialized affects the development of their sense of self. In elementary school, girls are accepted for their giftedness, but once girls reach sixth and seventh grade, their socialization tends to focus on fitting in, looking a certain way and acting a certain way (Bain & Bell. 2004; Kerr, 1994; Kilbourne, 2004; Moore & MacKinnon, 2001; Rimm, 2002). The shift in focus from being gifted and doing well academically to trying to fit in with peers can be extremely difficult for preadolescent girls (Kerr, 1994). The experience of trying to put aside giftedness in order to fit in has a direct impact on how a girl sees herself. Learning how these experiences relate to identity formation is important.

Need for the study

Both anecdotally and theoretically, the literature portrayed adolescence as a difficult time (Owens, 2002). The literature indicated that adolescence could be even more difficult for girls who are gifted (Bain & Bell, 2004; Kerr, 1994; Rimm, 2002). Counselors working in schools or agencies have a responsibility to understand the identity development process of gifted girls. This understanding may assist counselors in providing support for healthy development. If counselors do not understand how gifted girls form their self-concepts, they will not be able to assist girls who are struggling. Rimm (2002) described a need for a better understanding of this population when she stated, "counselors need to be trained to understand the peer pressures and isolations that gifted children feel so that social isolation doesn't lead to anger toward themselves and others" (p. 17). A greater understanding of the experience of gifted

girls and the challenges they face is pivotal to insuring that counselors serve them appropriately.

Knowledge of the experiences of giftedness for girls can only be achieved with an increase in research. Currently, there is very little research on the experiences of gifted girls (Dai, 2002). Counselor educators and counselors who are working with youth have a responsibility to learn about the experiences and identity issues of diverse populations. Gifted girls are a population that is largely ignored or minimized in the current literature, and yet, they are very often the clients that we serve in schools and agencies (Moon, 2002). Bain & Bell (2004), Kerr (1994), Bybee et al. (1990), and Dai (2002) all called for further research of this population. This study attempts to answer this call and addresses the limitations of the existing research.

Theoretical framework

The concept of diversity relates to individuals who identify themselves in a way that differs from the dominant group. This difference often leads to the domination and oppression of the non-dominant group (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). One component of oppression is the dominant group's discounting or misrepresenting the diverse group. The oppression of gifted girls is evident in the literature, while several researchers found that gifted girls are often minimized or ignored (Dai, 2002; Kerr, 1994). Gifted girls have unique issues that contribute to their development (Dai, 2002; Kerr, 1994; Rimm, 2002), yet there is a lack of literature that clearly explains their experiences. For the field of counseling to serve this population, research must begin to look at the issues from their perspective.

One of the difficulties in researching this population is that research on gender issues often "implicitly judges the adequacy of girls by using boys as standards of comparison" (Dai, 2002, p. 339). For research to address adequately the issues that gifted girls experience, the paradigm of researching girls from a dominant standard must shift (Dai, 2002; Gilligan et al., 1988). For research to reveal the participants' reality, the theory and methodologies utilized in that research must be guided by research questions (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Gifted girls are a diverse population, and, in order to research them appropriately, a methodology must be chosen that validates their experiences. The research perspective that is the least oppressive to this particular group is the multicultural perspective, because it allows for an open and equal relationship between the researcher and the participants. This openness is the only way to learn what gifted girls experience in their lives and how that forms their identity.

There are several different ways of conducting research with a multicultural framework, and, for research with gifted girls; the most appropriate is the feminist perspective. Both multicultural and feminist theories indicate that researchers should work with participants on a more equal level, and thus, provide an arena for silenced populations to speak. Gifted girls are a population that is often ignored in the literature; they are underserved due to both their gender and age. To truly provide an open experience for the research participants to express their views, this research study utilizes qualitative research methods.

To fully explore the relationship between gender and giftedness specifically related to identity development, it is necessary to approach the research in a way that

allows for discovery, rather than confirmation of existing theories or hypotheses. Qualitative methodology, specifically grounded theory, provides the necessary research tools for exploring the experiences of gifted girls. Merchant and Dupuy (1996) supported the use of qualitative research for groups of individuals, such as gifted girls, who are often marginalized, oppressed or left out of traditional research.

<u>Purpose of the study</u>

The literature provided theory and research findings related to the variety of ways giftedness is defined and viewed in society (Bernal, 2003; Delisle, 1992; Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst & Guerin, 1994; Sattler, 1992). Additionally, the literature supported the importance of understanding the identity development (Gilligan et al., 1988; Owens, 2002) and the process of socialization for girls (Gilligan et al., 1988; Kilbourne, 2004; Moore & MacKinnon, 2001; Sohoni, 1995). The literature also identified the transition from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade as a critical time for a gifted girl (Bain & Bell, 2004; Dai, 2002; Kerr, 1994; Rimm, 2002;). The existing literature did not provide research that adequately explains what gifted girls experience during this time of transition.

This study addresses the gap in the literature related to the identity development of gifted girls. Through this research, the counseling community will gain a broader understanding of the experience of giftedness for girls as they develop their identity. With this additional knowledge, counselors will be able to choose appropriate interventions to support gifted girls. For counselor educators, this study will provide information that is valuable as they train new counselors working with this population.

For this research, I selected girls who were gifted and in the sixth or seventh grade. The rationale for sampling this age group was literature that indicated a shift in self-concepts for girls that occurs in the transition from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade (Dai, 2002; Kerr, 1994; Rimm, 2002). Working with participants in the sixth or seventh grade allowed insight into their experiences during a time that is portrayed as pivotal and potentially difficulty by the literature. Working with three young women who were seniors in high school allowed insight from gifted girls who have moved through sixth and seventh grade and had some additional perspectives on their experience of giftedness. I worked with all of the girls over a period of 4 months conducting interviews related to my grand research question.

The grand research question was a component of grounded theory, which I used for this study. In grounded theory, the researcher begins the research process by deciding on one broad question (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This research question guides the researcher to examine the data from a specific perspective and determines the data collection and analysis procedures (Strauss & Corbin). This question shapes the focus of the initial interviews and narrows in scope as the study progresses. For this study, the grand research question was: What is the experience of giftedness for sixth and seventh grade girls?

Rationale for the use of grounded theory

This study utilized grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory allows for the theory to come from the research and provides freedom for the participants to shape the theory based on their experiences. Grounded theory frees researchers from the need to seek out one specific answer and allows the research to unfold in a manner

that is significant and empowering for the research participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory is also a disciplined structure, which can provide the researcher with a theory that is reflective of reality for the participant (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is a methodology designed to support the researcher in creating a research product that is creative but follows specific guidelines to insure the research is sound and reflective of the participants' views (Strauss & Corbin). These guidelines set by grounded theory assist the researcher in every aspect of the research, from choosing the research question to analyzing the data. Grounded theory also provides a structure for the identification of key concepts, which are then used for developing theory (Strauss & Corbin). Unlike quantitative methodologies, research with grounded theory begins with a general area of study, and the important information emerges over the course of the study (Strauss & Corbin).

Feminist theory, qualitative methodology, and specifically grounded theory, laid the foundation for exploration of this research. In this chapter, qualitative research is the most appropriate way to study the perceptions and experiences of gifted girls as they develop their identity. Grounded theory procedures provided a structure for developing a theory that begins to describe the experiences of giftedness for girls as they form their identity.

Overview of remaining chapters

Chapter two explores the literature relating to identity development of gifted girls. It begins with an examination of the multiple definitions of giftedness, followed by two perspectives of identity development, the traditional and the feminist. Next, the

academic and social influences upon gifted children are discussed. An exploration of gender differences follows, as well as a look at the specific needs of gifted girls in the development of their identity. This review also addressed why this area of research is important to the field of counseling and counselor education.

Chapter three then focuses on multicultural and feminist theory, which provided the framework for this study. Following that is a discussion of grounded theory and the specific techniques that were used for the research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and limitations to the methodology.

Chapters four, five and six detail the data analysis for the progressive rounds of data collection. Each of the chapters contains an analysis of the data supported by participant quotes, tentative theoretical structure, triangulation, and discussion.

Chapter seven provides the grounded theory of the experience of gifted girls transitioning from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade. This grounded theory evolved through the research process. This chapter also contains a discussion of the findings, limitations to the study and implications for counseling, counselor education, and further research.

CHAPTER II

Review of the literature

Overview of chapter

In this chapter, I examine the literature in the field of counseling and education related to giftedness, identity development, and gender. In qualitative research, the main purpose of the literature review is to assist in framing the research question (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, this literature search was conducted using both education and counseling databases but excluded the literature that related to curricula and academic issues as the primary focus of the research. Research with a combination of academic and social issues was included, as were studies related to the social issues alone.

This literature exploration illuminated the need for further research in the area of giftedness and identity development in girls. The literature review provided a framework of issues that relate to the experience of giftedness for girls. Those issues are how giftedness is defined, how identity development occurs, how academic issues and social issues relate to all gifted children, and how social issues influence girls. This chapter explores each of these issues as they connect to the research question and discusses how giftedness affects girls' identity development. This chapter culminates in a discussion of the importance of this research to the fields of counseling and counselor education.

The problem in context

Giftedness is an issue in education and counseling that has a broad range of definitions, understandings, and misinformation. By far, the majority of gifted

research is related to curriculum development, to debate over allocation of resources, and to the academic needs of gifted children. There is little information on the emotional needs of gifted children, and the research that is available contains contradictions. The literature in several key areas is critical to understanding the effect of giftedness on girls. This literature will be addressed next.

Defining gifted

When looking at how giftedness relates to identity development, it is critical to understand the definition of giftedness. This section reviews the variety of ways that giftedness is defined, the identification issues for students from diverse backgrounds, and the current trends in the field of gifted education. The exploration of the literature revealed that defining giftedness is complex and multifaceted.

The most prominent method of defining giftedness is the utilization of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R). A score on the WISC-R of 130 is the minimum score for identification as gifted (Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst, & Guerin, 1994). This test and other similar ability tests, such as the Stanford-Binet Intelligence scale-4th edition are the methods most often used by schools to identify gifted children. While there are other tests available, such as the Woodcock-Johnson III, much of the focus in the literature is on the WISC-R and the Stanford-Binet. Some researchers see these methods as the only methods with "strong relationships to other criteria, such as achievement, and often serves as an indication of academic ability" (Gottfried et al., 1994, p. 42).

Other researchers in the field of gifted research have expressed a more modern awareness that using a single test score to define giftedness may be prohibitive and

have suggested the use of other criteria (Baldwin, 2005; Bernal, 2003; Callahan, 2005; Delisle, 1992; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Sattler, 1992;). One alternative definition for giftedness is based upon achievement and outstanding prominence in an area (Sattler, 1992). This area can include one specific academic area, the arts, leadership, or creativity. Essentially, the term gifted has been used to "describe children with exceptionally high IQs, those who have creative talents, and those who are high on both dimensions" (Sattler, p. 661). Delisle (1992) reported that it was unlikely that a single definition of giftedness would be understood in this lifetime and may not be necessary.

Lewis Terman was the first to define giftedness. His work began in 1925 and ended in 1959, and, through that time, he not only investigated the relationship between IQ and giftedness in children but also how giftedness affected later life (Ziv, 1977). Terman was a pioneer in proclaiming the importance of using one standardized measure to pinpoint intelligence and to define giftedness (Delisle, 1992). This pinpointing of intelligence was the first attempt for children to be treated and tested as equals.

Since Terman's groundbreaking work, other researchers have attempted to de-emphasize IQ score as the defining characteristic of giftedness and have drawn attention to other abilities children may poses (Delisle, 1992). A modern view of giftedness includes aspects such as creativity, leadership, and artistic ability. Intelligence has been described as a "more global concept than was earlier imagined" (Sattler, 1992, p. 56).

In spite of conflicting views and definitions, there remains a heavy reliance on IQ tests for identification of gifted children in schools (Bernal, 2003). Bernal reported that giftedness is not a singular trait; therefore the use of a single test is not appropriate. Bernal stated "giftedness as a singular or multifaceted trait, as something that is inherent or acquired, it is clear that manifested giftedness is much more complex than the possession of high intelligence alone" (p. 187). The complexity of identification makes the task difficult for educators, researchers, counselors, and parents.

The fields of counseling and education have relied on test scores to identify gifted children in schools for economic and standardization purposes. However, the use of one test score may exclude children who do not perform well on standardized tests; this exclusion has affected children of color and girls at high rates (Bernal, 2003). When defining giftedness, researchers must consider all aspects of a child and remember that one score does not give a full picture of a child's abilities (Sattler, 1992). Giftedness should be reflected in both a high score on an IQ test and by considering the ways in which gifted children see and interact in the world (Sattler). A large part of the way gifted children see and interact with the world comes from their cultural background. The identification issues for children from a diverse group pose a unique set of variables for defining giftedness.

Multicultural considerations for defining gifted

Students of color are severely underrepresented in gifted programs nationally, and it is a problem that is beginning to generate discussions related to the methods and procedures in place for identifying gifted students. Also included in these discussions

in the literature are the inherent biases in the education system in general and the type

of curriculum and services offered to diverse students that may contribute to the

identification of gifted students. (Baldwin, 2005; Callahan, 2005; Castellano, 2002;

Ford, & Grantham, 2003).

While there has been an increase in representation of students of diverse racial

backgrounds in the school systems, there has not been an equal increase in the

numbers of students of diverse racial backgrounds in gifted programs (Baber, 2003;

Callahan 2005). The main area of contention is in the methods of identifying gifted

students. As stated earlier, the primary method of evaluation for identifying gifted

students is a standardized IQ test. "More than 90% of school districts use test scores

for placement decisions. This nearly exclusive reliance on test scores keeps the

demographics of gifted programs resolutely White and middle class" (Ford, &

Granthas, 2003, p. 218). These tests have been able to effectively identify white male

students, but are less effective in identifying culturally diverse students who are gifted

(Bernal 2003; Castellano, 2002; Ford, & Granthum, 2003), and girls who are gifted

(Bernal, 2003). This lack of effectiveness poses the question of why these tests

continue to be used. It is this question that is at the center of the debate about how to

be more inclusive in gifted programs.

Another contributing factor to the lack of diversity in gifted education is the

systemic belief that children of diverse cultures have generally lower levels of

intelligence. An inherent belief still exists that very few children who come from

ethnically diverse cultures are capable of developing into gifted children (Baldwin,

2005; Callahan, 2005; Ford & Granthas, 2003). Despite evidence that debunks this

belief, it is still pervasive in the education system. In fact, the belief goes even farther than to assume that these children will not perform at the gifted level. "There is a strong, erroneous belief that most of these children are so lacking in prerequisite basic skills or abilities that such development is highly unlikely" (Callahan, 2005, p. 99). The result of this belief is that the curriculum in place for children of color consists of remedial, low-level, uninteresting, unmotivating learning tasks.

Children of diverse cultural backgrounds are not given the opportunity to explore their abilities, to be creative, or to become critical, analytic thinkers (Callahan, 2005). If students are not given an opportunity to demonstrate their skills, how can they be identified as gifted? Ford (as cited in Ford, & Grantham, 2003) found that many African- American students with high achievement scores had not been referred for screening for giftedness. Teachers are the primary referral source, and teachers do not seem to be referring diverse students for testing (Ford & Gantham, 2003). It is unclear if this failure to refer students for testing is due to the students not having an opportunity in class to demonstrate their intelligence, or if it is because of the pervasive belief that students of color do not have the capacity to be gifted. Either way, the result is a lack of diversity in gifted programs.

This section has provided only a brief review of some of the issues of identifying gifted students from diverse populations. The literature on the struggles of diverse gifted students focused on racial diversity rather than gender, socioeconomic status, or other variables of diversity. For students who have multiple diversities, the issue would be confounded.

In general, the literature on giftedness described two predominant methods of identifying giftedness – via IQ scores and recognizing exceptionality in a specific area. The literature also showed the majority of schools dependent on the IQ score for identification. The debate over how to define giftedness and how to be more inclusive to diverse students will undoubtedly continue.

Current trends in the field of gifted education

In general, the vast majority of gifted education research is related to curriculum development, classroom instruction, and identification issues. Research on procedures for identification, for referral to testing, and the debate about the most appropriate method of identification abound (Brown et al., 2005). With the creation of the No Child Left Behind program, schools across the country have tried to ensure that every student has access to the minimum education requirements set forth by the program. Schools now have a goal to educate all students to their appropriate level, yet for gifted students these school-wide goals are not met (VanTassel-Baska, 2005). Rather, the push to ensure all students are educated at a similar level has led in general to the "dumbing down" of textbooks and classroom experiences, so that the lowest level students are the ones now setting the standards (Reis, 2003). The growing awareness of the lack of appropriate education for all students and the flaws in the current system of identifying gifted students has led to a small percentage of the research to examine these issues in more depth. There are currently several issues being explored in the literature.

The first and most prominent issue in the literature is the inequity of services and identification of students of the non-dominate culture. As discussed in the

previous section, there is a growing awareness that children from diverse backgrounds are not being identified or served, as they should be. "One of the most pressing and controversial topics is the under representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education. Few topics have the power to spark debates, denial and defensiveness" (Ford, 2003, p. 220). The lack of gifted education for diverse students seems to be the most pressing issue facing the current researchers of gifted education.

Another trend in the literature is related to how curriculum is created. There is a call for schools to look at the individual needs of the gifted students and to allow them to move through school at a pace that is appropriate for them (VanTassel-Baska, 2005). There is an understanding that gifted students develop and grow differently and that a good program will help a student develop their unique skills (Feldhusen, 2003). When students are not given an opportunity to grow and be challenged, their achievement declines. Underachievement in gifted students is also widely researched. There are many theories on why gifted students underachieve, but inappropriate curriculum is a component that is often discussed (Reis, 2003).

The final issue that is currently in the education literature is the needs of teachers to have higher levels of training in recognition of giftedness and how they foster giftedness in their classrooms (Baldwin, 2005; Callahan, 2005; Ford & Grantham, 2003; VanTassel-Baska, 2005). These authors discuss the importance of training teachers to design classroom material adequately for gifted learners. There is some discussion about training teachers to recognize gifted students based on performance in a class rather than by one standardized test score. Teacher training continues to be one of the topics at the center of the literature on gifted education.

This section provides only a glimpse into the current trends in gifted education. To explore these issues in depth is beyond the scope of this literature exploration. The purpose in discussing these issues is to begin to examine the issues that face gifted girls as they move through the education system. There are several aspects that make up the experience of a gifted girl, and the conflicting views of giftedness, the multicultural, curricula, and teacher issues all play a role in the gifted girls' experiences at school. These experiences are just one part of the process for gifted girls transitioning from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade.

Identity Development

Understanding the general process of identity development is crucial to understanding how giftedness might affect that process. As is true for the definition of giftedness, there are many ways to understand how children form their identity. The next two sections look at identity development from a traditional viewpoint and from a feminist viewpoint.

Identity Development: Traditional view

Identity development is the process of children learning who they are, developing a self-concept, and developing a sense of self (Owens, 2002). How children see themselves begins to solidify in late elementary school. Children go from describing themselves in terms of concrete and observable behaviors, skill sets, and preferences to describing themselves with generalizations such as "popular" or "smart".

The influence of peer relationships and ethnic identity becomes stronger as children move from late elementary school to middle school (Owens, 2002). At this

age, children begin to compare themselves to their peers to determine how they fit in both academically and socially. According to Owens, as children reach preadolescence, they begin to perceive interpersonal relationships as constituting the core of self. Thus social influences become central to children's identities.

As children move into adolescence, they become more introspective. Adolescents experience changes in self-esteem and tend to look to others to define their sense of self (Owens, 2002). According to Erikson (1950), during adolescence there is a process of "identity crisis"; which occurs when adolescents begin to question who they are and what they want from life. They look to their peers to model or mirror what they should be doing. At this stage in development, adolescents establish an inner sameness and a continuity of personality (Owens, 2002). Thus, the most crucial step in developing an identity is stepping away from their peers. Once adolescents are able to separate themselves from their peers, they have formed an independent identity.

This process of developing an identity, according to Erikson (1950), has its roots in the foundation and basic ideas of the self that are developed in early and middle childhood. For most individuals, this process is cumulative and moves successfully. For others, whose foundation is not strong or who get conflicting feelings about who they are, identity may not stabilize (Owens, 2002). Owens stated, "If the identity crisis is not successfully resolved, the adolescent is faced with a sense of identity diffusion and an inability to cope with the demands of adulthood" (p. 579).

From a stage theory, or traditional perspective, a child moves through a series of stages culminating in the formation of an identity. One pivotal stage includes

connecting with others and fitting in with peers. Adolescents stay in this stage until

they are able to separate themselves from their relationships, thus forming their own

identity. Erikson (1950) theorized that the goal of independence and separation should

be the goal for all individuals; feminist theory argues that this goal is not an

appropriate, or attainable for girls.

Identity development: Feminist view

In contrast to the stage theory ideas of development, Gilligan (1988) and her

colleagues described the process of developing a sense of self by researching

adolescent girls and women. This section discusses their findings related to feminist

views of identity development and ends with a discussion of key differences between

feminist and traditional views of identity development. It also explores current trends

in identity literature.

One of the first criticisms of stage theories, such as Erikson's, was the

exclusion of girls from the studies. Gilligan, Ward and Taylor (1988) stated, "To

reconsider adolescent development in light of the inattention to girls and women is to

hold in abeyance the meaning of such key terms as 'self' and 'development' and

perhaps above all, 'relationship'" (p. XI). They found that girls define themselves not,

as Erikson believed, by reflecting back what others saw, but by their relationships with

friends and family. Gilligan et al. (1988) described girls and adolescents as moving

toward connectedness with others. This perspective of identity development allows for

self-definition by the adolescent who is finding her voice and connection. This

understanding would not have surfaced had researchers continued to conduct research

with only male participants.

Stern (1991) further demonstrated the difference between stage theory and feminist theory when she described her work with girls in the process of adolescent growth. Stern stated that all psychological theories of development point to the critical role of relationships in either enhancing or inhibiting development. For feminist, theorists the emphasis is on the significance of relationships in every aspect of a girl's development. Erikson's theory of development explained that detaching from relationships forms that self-identity; this view was considered inaccurate for women (Gilligan et al., 1988; Stern, 1991).

For women's development, the primacy of relationships at all levels can result in difficulties, but for adolescent girls maintaining a connection with peers can be extremely difficult (Stern, 1991). Girls attempting to fit in with peers need to conform to the behaviors of their peers. The behaviors of their peers may be different from the way they see themselves, and, in order to fit in, they do what their peers are doing. Stern presented this struggle to build relationships as important when considering the effects of peer pressure, media images, academic pressure, etc. upon girls' identities. If there is pressure in a peer group to look a certain way, an adolescent may feel pulled to look the same even if it does not feel congruent with who she is. To decrease the ensuing dissonance, Stern stated, adolescent girls may begin to see themselves outside the relationships, which can cause stress. The development of self in connection with others is a challenging dilemma that is central to their lives. For adolescent girls, this path of development can feel as conflicted as the theories themselves.

Within the literature, the traditional view of identity development and the feminist view of identity development differ dramatically. The primary difference is

the feminist researchers' use of girls to conduct research, opening up a new understanding of girls. Feminist researchers found that girls form their identity in connection to relationships of family and friends. This finding diverges significantly from traditional theory that found that individuals move into more autonomous and independent states as completion of their identity development. From the feminist view, for an adolescent girl to develop a self-concept, she will come to understand the relationships that are most important to her, she will develop a voice in relation to others, and she will understand herself not in terms of male standards of independence, but in terms of how she fits with society (Gilligan et al, 1988; Kerr, 1994; Stern, 1991).

Current trends in identity research

The process of identity development continues to be researched with the underlying premise that identity allows individuals to define themselves and their place in the world (Schwartz, 2005). Identity research has the potential to be broad and to cover a variety of practical issues, yet the research has become narrow and largely focused on developmental models from the 50s and 60s (Schwartz). After a search of the literature, Schwartz noted that what is missing is theory on social identity. Social identity is the way in which individuals present themselves to the world and the process by which they negotiate the social world. This lack of research on the social identity is also discussed by Mahalik et al. (2005) when they described the process of gender norms and the influence those norms have on women's identity development. An important component of identity development is to understand the social influences on individuals. For women's development, this includes gender role norms.

Several other areas are notably missing from current identity research including the role of ethnicity and other components of diversity. "This is a major weakness, especially in today's global world where people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds come into contact on an everyday basis" (Schwartz, 2005, p. 295). While there are areas of research dedicated to understanding racial identity, the broader field of identity development research still does not include race, ethnicity, gender, and other diversity variables in its research (Schwartz, 2005).

One of the reasons ethnicity, race, and gender may not be included in identity development research is because there is still a reliance on White, middle and upper-middle class college men for the research. This reliance on men was one of the main criticisms of Erikson and Kolbergs studies (Gilligan et al., 1988), and it is still true today (Schwartz, 2005). As a result of focusing on white men, ethnic identity has been "largely ignored in the identity status literature" (Schwartz, 2005, p. 297). Understanding that social development is an important component to identity development, and also knowing that different cultural groups have different social values, are both important pieces that are missing from identity research.

Scwartz (2005) also spoke to the lack of research related to early and middle adolescence. There is a lack of research in the field with emerging adults to provide information about the early process of identity formation. The result is that the bulk of the literature only understands the end of the identity formation process, not the process itself. Along with providing information about the process, the inclusion of diversity of ethnicity, gender, race, etc. provides the field with information about the variations in the nature and course of identity development (Schwartz, 2005). There

are other emerging cultural issues that may have an impact on identity formation that will be important for the field. These issues include physical health, such as the rising HIV rates, immigration and acculturation, terrorism, and war.

While new social issues should be considered in identity development research, there continues to be a lack of research outside the standard White, middle and upper-middle class men whom Gilligan and her colleagues discussed 2 decades ago. The field is still dependent on an old foundational model of development, and while Erikson's contribution to the field is critical, the field has failed to provide a broader understanding of identity development.

It is the hope that this research will add a new perspective to the field and will provide a deeper understanding of the process of identity development for this population. As described by Schwartz (2005), there is a new realization that the social influences can have a large effect on an individual's identity. As girls move through the process of development, a variety of factors may influence or block her development. Academic and peer interaction both play an important role in a girl's social environment, and thus her identity development.

Academic influences on identity development

Children learn who they are by interacting in the world, and for school age children, that world is predominantly school and home. This section examines the literature related to how school influences the development of identity for all gifted children. Within the literature, there was conflict and contradiction regarding the strength and type of influence exerted by academics (for example: school environment, teacher beliefs about giftedness, peer interaction). This section also

reviews the multiple findings about the role of academics on the identity development of gifted children.

Children spend a great deal of time each day in school, and authors agree that the school environment influences children's identity development. Given these assumptions, academic self-concept should have a large impact on the way in which children see themselves. McCoach and Siegle (2003) concurred, "Academic self-concept involves a description and an evaluation of one's perceived academic abilities. Academic self-concept encompasses global beliefs of self-worth associated with one's perceived academic competence" (p. 145). In general, children compared their own performance in the classroom with their peers, and, often, gifted children were performing at higher levels than their peers. McCoach and Siegle commented further that when people "compare favorably to those around them in a particular domain, they are more likely to maintain high self-concepts in that domain" (p. 145). It follows that gifted children may then have a higher academic self-concept and a stronger feeling of self-worth.

In contrast, Bybee, Glick and Zigler's (1990) research showed that McCoach and Siegle's (2003) conclusions might have been too simplistic. Bybee et al. described focusing almost exclusively on self-esteem as the flaw in much of the self-image research. The researchers found the fit between children's views of themselves and their ideal self-image was an overlooked component of identity development research. Bybee et al. found that gifted children's ideal self-image was born from pressure to be successful by parents and teachers. They discovered that this pressure was related to

how gifted children see themselves, but they did not know to what extent. Bybee et al.

explained that:

> brighter children may have greater expectations put upon them by
> parents and teachers, and may have loftier personal expectations
> concerning school and career success. Beyond findings that
> brighter children set higher ideals for themselves than less
> intellectually able children, little is known of differences in the
> ideal self-image across groups that vary in their level of intellectual
> abilities. (p. 351)

Bybee et al.'s (1990) work opened up the possibility of a relationship between the way

gifted children believe they should be and they way they see themselves. Jones's

(2003) work expanded on this idea and looked at the multiple identities taken on by

children.

Jones (2003) reported that the multiple identities that children take on are

"formed and re-formed by societal norms" (p. 222). For gifted children, these

identities may include race, gender, culture, and giftedness. During the school day,

norms based on any one of these multiple identities affect the way children see

themselves. Teachers' and administrators' views of giftedness set the norms within

schools. This school norm setting is important to the way children view their

giftedness, thus relating to their identity development.

The teachers' and administrators' views of giftedness directly impact the

norms of the school system (Jones, 2003). Unfortunately with no single standard or set

diagnostic criteria, giftedness has often been minimized and not understood, valued, or

believed (Bernal, 2003). Bernal found that it was common for teachers to dilute the

concept of giftedness by emphasizing that "everyone has gifts." This type of attitude

denied and diminished the needs of those children who were gifted. This minimization

of giftedness was also found to diminish the gifted child's sense of self-identity and self-worth. Bernal found that teachers of gifted children found themselves in a battle with administrators who believe that there is not a need to "provide any more opportunities to children who 'have it made'" (p. 187). This notion that gifted children do not need anything different ignores their needs and a part of who they are. Gifted children do need help in gaining a good sense of self, because they inherently understand things differently from their non-gifted peers (Bernal).

Part of this difference is that gifted children tend to be much harder on themselves academically and socially then do non-gifted children (Bernal, 2003). Children spend much of their time in schools, and the image reflected back by schools impacts their identities. Negative or confusing messages that schools send to children about their giftedness may make children feel like their intelligence is a burden rather than a valuable part of who they are.

In a case study by Barone and Schneider (2003), a gifted teacher in a pull-out gifted program talked about her main focus being on students' "social skills and problem solving . . . students were valued for their thinking and problem solving abilities" (p. 267). Students in this class were given the choice of working alone or with a partner, and the focus of academics was on how a student arrived at an answer, not the answer itself. All these qualities helped support the students' academic identity development, which in turn supports and helps their more general sense of self (Bybee et al., 2003).

The literature varies when describing the possible impact the school environment has on a gifted child's identity development. Literature reviewed here

found that children who are gifted do better in school, and thus feel better about

themselves. There is also literature that found that gifted children hold an ideal sense

of self based on feedback they receive from parents and teachers, which adds pressure

to gifted children who try to live up to that ideal self. These issues relate to all gifted

children, but there are some issues that are unique to girls. To further understand how

being a gifted girl relates to identity development, the issues that girls face in their

identity development is discussed.

Identity development of girls

This section reviews issues of identity development that are specific to girls,

including literature on the socialization process of girls and the social pressures that

have the strongest influence on a girl's sense of self. In both psychology and

counseling literature, authors addressed gender differences in identity development

and socialization in a limited manner. Within both fields, there was agreement that

boys and girls are different and have different needs (Gilligan et al., 1988). As

discussed earlier, girls tend to develop their identity in terms of relationships and

connection to others, which can be a struggle. This struggle is based on the

socialization process. Sohoni (1995) commented on this socialization process stating:

> Culture refers to a set of shared ideas, beliefs, values, and practices
> about what is right and wrong, good and evil, desirable and
> undesirable. Acculturation begins at birth, as a person learns the
> rules, relationships, roles, expectations and entitlements of the
> culture into which she or he is born. (p. 15)

This quote emphasizes the role of culture and the socialization process of girls. Sohoni

(1995) went on to say that gender is not simply a biological assignment, but

determined by culture and shaped through significant relationships. Sohoni described

girls as being socialized from birth to take on specific roles by society. This socialization process contributes to the development of an identity.

Other researchers have echoed this thought and have attempted to demonstrate at what age children take on gender roles. Wehren and De Lisi (1983) attempted to address the important developmental issue of gender understanding. Their aim was to show the age at which children understand gender as consistent and the influence of gender norms. They found that at age three children could identify gender but not gender consistency. By age seven, children understood gender as consistent, and, by age nine, they were able to distinguish gender norms and societal influence. This study was important, as it established that children understand gender early and that societal norms and pressures are influential. This understanding of gender norms and roles contributes to pressures that girls feel to find relationships that are secure (Gilligan et al., 1988).

Two ways in which girls are socialized are by societal pressures and gender role norms and stereotypes (Mahalik et al, 2005). Researchers such as Moore and MacKinnon (2001), Kilbourne (2004) and Tiggmenn (2000) are just a few whose work focused on the social influences on girls' identity. Moore and MacKinnon stated that a girl's sense of self is shaped and forged primarily through social interaction, the bulk of this interaction being with peers and in school.

Peer pressure stems, in part, from a powerful influence, the media. While the media has influence on both boys and girls, the research showed that its influence is more harmful for girls. Moore and MacKinnon (2001) found that girls understand the impact of media. They found girls "clearly illustrate how social interaction and

personal identity are potently influenced by the pervasive and compelling nature of their messages" (p. 310). Tiggmann, Gardiner and Slater (2000) also found that girls understood the influence of the media. They found that girls "Very clearly and articulately described how the constant barrage by the media of thin, attractive, glamorous women leads to the belief that thinness and attractiveness are the cultural norm" (p. 655). The girls in this study could discuss these influences, but they expressed powerlessness to stop the pressure from the media and society.

The influence of the media was also present in Kilbourne's (2004) work. She reported that girls are taught by the media to be quiet, not talk too much or too loudly, and not to have needs. The young women studied talked often about looking to media images as the norm and looking for peer confirmation of what is expected. The influence of the media is powerful, and this power becomes stronger as girls enter middle school and high school (Kilbourne, 2004). Stern (1991) described these years as the time when girls feel drawn to maintain relationships with their peers. If relationships stem from a view of what young women "should be," there will be an ongoing power of the media on girls and young women.

This section covered some of the specific issues that girls face in the struggle to form an identity including the age of gender understanding, the role of socialization, and the strong influence of peers and the media. Understanding how giftedness relates to identity development for girls is the next area of exploration; it is also the crux of the study.

<u>Support for the study</u>

Girls, giftedness and identity development

This section explores the literature that looks at the way academics and social pressure affect gifted girls in the process of developing their identity. This section also focuses on the development of girls as they move from elementary to sixth and seventh grade. These years are times that were found to be key in development and pivotal to my research question.

The literature revealed little research in the area of identity development specifically for gifted girls. Bain and Bell (2004) reported that there was some evidence that girls who are gifted have lower self-concepts than do boys. Bain and Bell explained that gifted girls tend to "experience diminished self-confidence as they enter adolescence, likely due to parental, teacher, and societal expectations" (p. 168). Kerr (1994) echoed this idea when she stated "some highly gifted girls may choose social isolation over conformity if none of their true interests coincide with those of their peers" (p. 115). She indicated that this choice seemed to come to girls entering sixth and seventh grade.

Bain and Bell (2004) supported Kerr's (1994) finding that during elementary school, gifted girls seemed more popular than their non-gifted peers, but this popularity shifted once girls reached adolescence. Rimm's (2002) research had similar findings, indicating that, typically, gifted elementary school children were well liked by their peers and sometimes were even more popular than their peers, but, by middle school, that popularity advantage disappeared. Rimm added that by the time a gifted girl reaches adolescence, she may have an extremely difficult time fitting in and she

may experience intense social isolation in a regular classroom. She found that gifted girls find themselves continually monitoring their social behavior to conform to the expectations of their peer group.

Gilligan et al.'s (1988) work showed that social isolation and a break in relationships can be extremely damaging to a young girl as she develops her identity. Rimm's findings that gifted girls feel pulled to conform with others so that they can maintain relationships that are pivotal to the development of identity. This change from acceptance in elementary school to isolation in middle school comes at a time when, developmentally, relationships are crucial.

Understanding what changes for girls from elementary to sixth and seventh grade is important, yet research in this area is missing from the literature. Bain and Bell (2004) identified this gap stating "notably missing from the research literature are investigations examining the combination of self-concept, social attributions, and peer relationships of gifted students in preadolescence" (p. 169). Bain and Bell expressed the importance of this research stating that late elementary/early middle school is a time where gifted girls begin to experience a decrease in self-concept.

Bain and Bell's (2004) research found a difference in the way gifted students viewed themselves in relationship to their peers. In general, gifted students in elementary school were more confident and had higher levels of self-actualization. This view begins to shift in late elementary school. One explanation for the difference pertained to teachers' views of boys and girls and indicated "perceptions about academically bright boys differs from perceptions about academically bright girls as early as the late elementary grades" (p. 176). This finding fits with the research on

school norms and how they influence children. Bain and Bell found a school norm that gifted girls are seen differently in late elementary school. This change in the way giftedness in girls is perceived gives gifted girls messages about how they fit in. Kerr (1994) stated, "Being a well adjusted gifted girl meant being similar enough to the average to avoid notice and gain approval" (p. 111). This shift in school norms related to giftedness and gender is just one of the factors discovered in the literature.

Another area in which the research supported a shift from elementary school to middle school is in interests and socialization. Bybee et al. (1990) found that between fifth and eighth grade, a girl's interest in utilizing and exploring her own intellectual abilities dropped significantly. This drop in interest in academic achievement is notable with other research regarding preadolescence and social pressure to fit in. Marriage and family relationships were more important for female eighth grade students than for male students, which spoke to the understanding of gender roles. Bybee's research also discovered that girls found beauty to be central to what it is like to be female, and being fully female is crucial in fitting in.

Kerr's (1994) research found that as gifted girls hit puberty, it was no longer socially acceptable to be smart. The pressure to be popular and to fit in began to grow, causing a shift in the way girls see themselves. Dai (2002) stated, "adolescent girls in general, and gifted girls in particular, are often thought to have vulnerable self-concepts and self-esteem and decreased educational and career aspirations" (p. 317). This vulnerable self-concept and self-esteem have direct implications for the formation of identity.

This section focused on some of the themes in the literature related to how giftedness is experienced by girls as they move through elementary school and into sixth and seventh grade. The pressure to fit in and the ways in which teachers perceive gifted girls combine to make this transition a difficult one. These are important findings for research in this area and for the field of counseling in general. The next section looks at the implications that research on the experience of gifted girls and their identity development will have on the field of counseling and counselor education.

Implications for counseling and counselor education

This chapter has reviewed the literature related to defining giftedness, identity development, academic issues, social issues, and the overall effect on girls who are gifted as they form their identity. The purpose of this section is to explore the implications that this type of research will have on counseling and counselor education.

The counseling profession has a preventative and developmental perspective (Owens, 2002), and, if the profession wishes to support the healthy development of gifted girls, it must consider their unique perspectives and challenges. Whether counselors are working in schools or mental health settings, they will benefit from insight into how gifted girls see themselves. As Rimm (2002) pointed out, counselors need to be "trained to understand the peer pressures and isolations that gifted children feel so that social isolation doesn't lead to anger toward themselves and others" (p.17).

Counselors who work with gifted girls must ensure that they have an understanding of what issues those girls are likely to experience. Counselors must

choose interventions that are appropriate for each client, and a deeper understanding of identity development for gifted girls will assist counselors in choosing those interventions. For counselors who are working in the schools, this information is critical, not only for the individual students they may see, but for purposes of advocating for these students to other school personnel.

Learning to recognize and advocate for the unique issues of this population can most effectively be passed down to counselors through their training. Counselor educators must understand the ways in which gifted girls form their identity. Counselor educators have an ethical obligation to ensure that the training of all new counselors is inclusive of diverse populations (Association of Counselor Education and Supervision, 2005). A portion of this training is likely to follow the multicultural counseling competencies created by Sue and Arredondo in 1992. At the heart of these competencies is a clinician's understanding of a client's worldview, the clinician's own beliefs and values, and choosing interventions that are appropriate for that population.

The literature has shown that girls who are gifted have a unique worldview, and interventions that would be appropriate for working with them would also be unique. Counselor educators train counselors to work with clients who may have multi-levels of diversity, such as race and sexual orientation. Giftedness can also be seen as another level of diversity, and it is important that counseling students who wish to work with youth begin to see the layers of diversity in this population.

In order for counselors to see this population as a diverse group, it is critical that counselor educators do the same. Counselor educators have a responsibility to

understand and pass on to future counselors what the life experiences and self-identity issues may be for this population, just as they would any other diverse group. This population is largely ignored or minimized in the current literature but is a population that most youth counselors interact with. Not only does the field need more research in this area, it needs a different type of research.

Dai (2002) called for a new way to approach research on the identity development of gifted girls, stating, "the way we ask those research questions reflects some fundamental assumptions about gender differences or lack thereof" (p. 338). He urged researchers to restructure questions so that "girls' strengths and weaknesses can be studied in a more sensible, tractable and productive manner" (p. 342). He called for research of girls to be in their voices and for the use of qualitative methodology with this population.

In the field of counseling and counselor education, there has been research on the development of girls' identity, as well as research on giftedness. The field is lacking in research that explores the experience of giftedness related to identity development of girls, specifically the changes between late elementary and sixth and seventh grade. For counselors who serve youth, this research is paramount to understanding an underserved, misunderstood population.

Summary of chapter two

This chapter contains an examination of the literature related to the identity development of gifted girls. Considered here were the variety of ways giftedness is defined, how identity develops, and the influence of academic and social pressures upon this development. In addition, the unique impact of giftedness and social

pressures on girls was explored. Finally, implications for the field of counseling and counselor education were discussed.

In a more general sense, the review of the literature brought to light the struggle that gifted sixth and seventh grade girls endure in order to fit in. The finding that elementary school-aged, gifted girls are accepted for their giftedness, yet adolescent gifted girls often put their giftedness aside and focus on fitting in (Kerr, 1994; Rimm, 2002) was a theme in the literature and speaks to the struggles of sixth and seventh grade girls. This fitting in is crucial for forming relationships, and, according to feminist theory, forming relationships is at the heart of developing an identity. These findings have shaped the research question and methodology; both are the focus of Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Overview of the study

Chapter II provided an overview of the research and theory related to identity development of gifted girls. The review encompassed the variety of definitions of giftedness, identity development, and the influence of academic and social pressures on identity development. It also included literature regarding gender differences and the effects of academic and social pressures on gifted girls. The literature review revealed that the identity of gifted girls is unique (Kerr, 1994) and has not been adequately researched (Dai, 2002). The literature indicated that elementary school aged, gifted girls are accepted for their giftedness, yet gifted girls in sixth and seventh grade often put their giftedness aside in order to fit in. The experience of putting aside giftedness during this transition into preadolescence is the focus of this research study.

Overview of the chapter

The purpose of Chapter III is to describe the methodology that was used in this study. This chapter begins with a discussion of the conceptual framework that was used for this study. This framework is comprised of both multicultural and feminist theory. Following that framework is a discussion of grounded theory, the methodology chosen for this research. This chapter concludes with a discussion of grounded theory techniques, including the method of data collection, analysis, ways to ensure trustworthiness, and limitations of this methodology.

<u>Support for the approach to the study</u>

Multicultural theory in research

      The decision to use qualitative methodology rather than quantitative methodology stems from the researcher's question and population of study (Patton, 1990). The use of quantitative methods "requires the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into predetermined response categories" (p. 14). Qualitative methods focus on the process and "are ways of finding out what people do, know, think and feel" (p. 94). For researchers working with a diverse population, attempting to fit individual experiences into measures standardized to the dominant population does not make sense. Qualitative research allows participants to express their reality and is a more appropriate choice for a diverse population.

      From a review of the literature on multicultural theory, emerged a theme best described by Lincoln and Denzin (2004). They wrote that research is moving away from "grand narratives and single, overarching ontological, epistemological, and methodological paradigms" (p. 612). Modern research is shifting from interpreting other people's views from a distance to a more combined exploration where the researcher and participant work together to explore the issue under study. Lincoln and Denzin (2004) stated that research is moving toward the humanistic commitment of the researcher to "study the world always from the perspective of the gendered, historically situated, interacting individual" (p. 612). In other words, research from a multicultural perspective allows participants to be who they are and should not attempt to make assumptions about individuals, but rather to let the individuals share their

perspectives. Multicultural research calls for inclusion of the voices of the participants in research process (Lincoln & Denzin).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) discussed several phases of qualitative research beginning in the early 1900s and moving to modern times. From the time of its inception, qualitative researchers have attempted to define an individual's experiences in terms of hopes and values. Consistent through time was an influence of politics and social ideology on the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln). In traditional research, participants were viewed "objectively," and the goal of the research was to provide objective, reliable interpretations. The participant in this early time was often seen as "foreign and strange" (p. 23).

The next phase of research was described as the "embodied belief in the contingency of self and society, and held to emancipatory ideals" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 23). This phase of research began in the 1970s, and, for some, the goals are still the same. During this phase, researchers believed that through the process of conducting research, groups of people could be "freed" and the researcher had the power to do the freeing. These beliefs are filled with assumptions that a researcher can know what a group wants or feels and that the power comes from the researcher, not the participant.

The most modern view of multicultural research practice is that research should be a way to collect information about individual experiences. The researcher's goal is to work with participants equally by building relationships and by recognizing and acknowledging researcher biases. Researchers explore with the participant the participant's worldview and experiences. In order for researchers to work with

participants equally, they must hold a belief that all people have a right to have their voices heard and to share their experiences. Christians (2004) stated, "With the starting hypothesis that all human creatures have something important to say, social science research recognizes particular cultural values consistent with universal human dignity" (p. 230). Modern multicultural research demonstrates an increase in cultural competence. This increase in cultural competence is also occurring in counseling practice, and the two influence each other.

Within the field of counseling and counselor education, Sue and Arredondo (1992) wrote a set of multicultural counseling competencies that were adopted by the American Counseling Association. These competencies recommended that counselors have an understanding of their own biases, gain an understanding of the culturally different client's worldview, and use culturally sensitive strategies. These same competencies can by applied to research with multicultural populations.

Merchant and Dupuy (1996) explored the application of the multicultural counseling competencies to research. The authors indicated that qualitative research might more adequately suit the purposes of multicultural studies. They reported that seeking an understanding of individual experiences and how these experiences are interpreted is more appropriate for understanding individuals. Merchant and Dupuy stated "the various aspects of qualitative research that address multicultural paradigms include recognizing nonlinear causality and interrelatedness, making social and cultural contexts explicit, and valuing interpersonal relationships and subjectivity" (p. 539).

One fundamental difference between qualitative and quantitative research is that qualitative research highlights the importance of the context in which research occurs (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996). The context includes the participants, the researcher and the relationship between the two, and the research process itself. An important aspect of this research is the understanding of the personal histories and experiences of the participants. Part of understanding comes with valuing and accepting the cultural histories of the participants. In order for participants to share their experiences, the researcher must be willing to discuss any assumptions or biases that are occurring. "Qualitative research allows for making implicit cultural assumptions explicit and for stating relevant values and circumstances under which the data were gathered" (p. 539). These authors expressed that the differences between qualitative and quantitative research allow qualitative researchers to examine fully the cultural context of the research participants.

One compelling argument for the use of qualitative research with a multicultural population is that "psychological research has historically focused on the experiences of White, middle-class men, and the results from those studies have been generalized to or used as a measure for members of cultural minorities and other marginalized groups" (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996, p 341). As discussed in Chapter II, the use of Caucasian males as primary research subjects for understanding identity development was inadequate for understanding the unique issues of girls (Gilligan et al., 1995). Merchant and Dupuy challenged researchers to "develop new ways to understand the multiple levels of oppression and the complexity of identity development" (p. 341). Qualitative methodology provides the necessary research tools

for exploring the experiences of groups of individuals who are often marginalized, oppressed, or left out of traditional research (Merchant & Dupuy). One group that is often excluded from research is gifted girls.

Feminist theory in research

One epistemology that allows exploration of many different groups is the feminist epistemology. Research based on feminist epistemology identifies "ways in which dominant conceptions and practices of knowledge attribution, acquisition and justification systematically disadvantage women and other subordinated groups, and strives to reform these conceptions and practices so that they serve the interest of these groups" (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2003, p.1). From its inception, feminist theory in research has had many different models and leaders (Chafetz, 2004; Barber, 2004)

This researchers understanding and beliefs about feminist theory in research come from a combination of several works, beginning with the work of Patty Lather (1991). Lather's pivotal work summed up feminist research by saying "to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry" (p. 71). For this research, being a girl who is gifted in sixth and seventh grade may have more of an impact then just being gifted. Other researchers (Barber, 2004; Chafetz, 2004; Humm, 1995; Maher, 1999; Walker, 2004) agree with Lather that at the heart of the feminist research is gender. Feminist theory starts with a woman's experience of oppression and attempts to provide meaning to that experience based on the history of women's subordination that extends from a political condition down to a private experience (Humm, 1995). Humm also expressed that feminist research maintains the

goal of creating theories and ideas grounded in the experiences of women and in the language of women. Conducting research in the experiences and language of women is best done through investigating women's lives and experiences through research that is not seeking a specific answer, but rather is open to hearing the women's experiences. Thus, the preferred method of study from this perspective is qualitative in nature.

Qualitative research involves an emotional closeness that is needed to truly understand a woman's experiences, while quantitative research is based on power differentials, and thus not appropriate for truly understanding the woman's view (Humm, 1995; Maher, 1999). Emotional closeness creates an environment in which women are able to express themselves feely (Humm, 1995). Maher (1999) added that a qualitative research approach gives participants the power to narrate their experience and that methods such as quantitative are by nature more passive and do not allow the participant the freedom to tell their story. This idea that qualitative methodologies are the most appropriate methods for conducting research from a feminist perspective is currently up for debate.

There is a new trend that calls for feminist research to utilize a variety of methods and approaches in order to understand the needs of women (Barber, 2004; Chafetz, 2004; Walker, 2004). Barber (2004) wrote that researchers need to have a tool kit of data collection methods and procedures so that the methods selected stem from the research question, rather than from a larger guiding theory. Walker (2004) stated that diversity among researchers, even feminist researchers, is inevitable. This diversity includes research methodologies and techniques. With this debate regarding

appropriate methodologies, comes an understanding that the roots of feminism have changed little.

Oleson (2004) wrote about the direction of modern feminist theory as women move into the new millennium. She suggested, "feminist qualitative research is highly diversified, enormously dynamic, and thoroughly challenging to its practitioners, its followers, and its critics" (p. 332). She concurred with other authors, such as Humm (1995) and Maher (1999) that while feminism has different theoretical foundations and differing political agendas, there is a common purpose, which is to realize social justice for all women. Chafetz (2004) suggested a minimalist definition that would encompass the variety of understandings about feminist research. Her suggested definition included the idea that gender is a system of inequality in which men are valued and enjoy greater social resources, gender inequity stems socially, this inequity is unjust and unfair, and all feminists should strive to eliminate gender inequity (Chafetz, 2004). This notion of creating a common, minimal definition is new to the field and is a way to further structure feminist research.

With the new focus of feminist research allowing the researcher to choose the techniques and methods that best serve the research question, and the goal of this research to explore the experiences of gifted girls, utilized a grounded theory methodology. The remainder of this section focuses on the use of grounded theory and more specific strategies used in this study.

Grounded theory in research

Grounded theory is a way of doing research that allows freedom and creativity for the researcher (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is also a disciplined

structure that guides the researcher to a theory that is reflective of the reality of the participant (Strauss & Corbin). For these reasons I have chosen grounded theory as the methodology for this study. This section describes grounded theory in more detail and discusses the rationale for using grounded theory to address the research question.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) described the process of grounded theory as creating theory from data that has been systematically gathered and analyzed. Strauss and Corbin explained that a researcher should not begin research with a preconceived theory, but rather choose an area of study and allow the theory to emerge from the data. They stated, "Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the 'reality' than is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation" (p. 12). They believed that because grounded theory is drawn from data, it is more likely to offer insight into participant experiences than traditional research methodology.

Grounded theory is a methodology designed to support the researcher in creating a research product that is creative but follows specific guidelines to ensure the research is sound and reflective of the participants' views (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The guidelines of grounded theory assist the researcher in every aspect of the research, from choosing the research question to analyzing the data. Grounded theory methods also provide a structure for the identification of key concepts, which are then used for developing a theory. Unlike quantitative methodologies, research with grounded theory begins with a general area of study, and then the important theory emerges over the course of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory creates theory that has direct implications for the question being studied. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated, "Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (p. 12). With this method, the researcher creates the theory as the research develops. The process of creating a theory comes from coding the data to build concepts, themes, and relationships. As Strauss and Corbin stated, the emerging theory is directly related to the participant's reality. After investigating the literature related to identity development of gifted girls, I concluded that grounded theory is the most appropriate research method for gathering, analyzing, and deducing theory of the experiences of gifted girls transitioning to sixth and seventh grade.

Feminist theory, qualitative methodology, and specifically, grounded theory lay the foundation for exploration in this research. Following the structure of analysis defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) allows findings from this research to be a foundation for other research related to the experience of giftedness for sixth and seventh grade girls.

One component of the use of grounded theory and qualitative methodology is the researcher's awareness of biases and assumptions throughout the research process. These biases can block the researcher from finding connections in the data and can lead the participants in specific directions, rather that allowing the research to unfold (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1995). It is for purposes of disclosure that in the next section I discuss my own worldview and how it relates to the research question.

Researcher's worldview

I hold a view of people that stems from my own cultural foundation. I believe we can only help clients by being comfortable with them being who they truly are. As a clinician, I have worked with many clients whose beliefs and actions I did not agree with or feel comfortable with, and I learned that I was only able to help them if I did not try to create a cultural shift for them. Many people come into counseling for guidance and ideas on how to make their lives more meaningful and their relationships stronger. This process may require some shifts in the way the client sees the world, or thinks about the world, and the change must come from them based on their own worldview. Within the counseling relationship, both the client and the counselor hold unique worldviews, and, through the process, a third worldview is created. These same ideas apply when conducting research.

My ethnic background is a mix of Russian Jewish and European. My mother's family came to America from somewhere in Europe long before any records were kept. My father's family came from Russia. My grandfather lost his family due to their religious beliefs. My father was first generation American, the first to graduate from college. That entire side of my family, including my father, has passed on. I grew up without any particular religious beliefs; neither of my parents practiced, so my ethnic identity is based on growing up Caucasian, upper-middle class. My father's ethnic group has historically been oppressed. I identify, not with the religion, but with the struggle to find a place in the world, and my grandfather's determination to find peace. It is this part of me that drives my desire to explore the voices of a population that is not often explored.

As a white woman growing up in an upper-middle class area, for a long time I saw myself without ethnicity or culture. My mother was the only one in my neighborhood who worked. She is a professor of nursing, and most of the neighbors would not talk to us for this reason. This difficulty is the piece of my life that has shaped my feminist views. I believe that the root of feminism is choice; my mother made a choice to work, and it was not well received. Having a high socioeconomic status within my family of origin brought with it privileges that I am only now beginning to realize. In looking at how these few points from my history relate to my research epistemology, it is the notion that women should have choices and a sense of power regardless of the popularity of those choices. I also see that, growing up as a young intelligent girl, there was not a lot of room for me in society. I believe that all people deserve a voice and that the voice of girls is often excluded. It is these beliefs that have drawn me to the use of qualitative methodology and grounded theory. It is my belief through the use of grounded theory, that my research will be sound from the point of data collection, the use of techniques to ensure trustworthiness, and through the final building of the theory in spite of any assumptions I bring to the study.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that all researchers carry with them recognized and unrecognized assumptions. They stated that it is crucial that researchers learn to work through their assumptions. From my experience and the literature, I entered this research with a set of assumptions. I believed I would find that for gifted girls entering sixth and seventh grade the pressure to fit in and be part of a peer group outweighs the need to express their giftedness. I thought I would also find that there is confusion for these girls regarding what they should be and who they want

to be. In addition, I expected to find that they perceive their teachers and parents as not fully understanding their giftedness and struggles. By clarifying and bracketing these assumptions, I ensured that their voice is heard, not mine.

<u>Data collection procedures</u>

The aim of this section is to describe the data collection procedures that were used to explore the main research question: What is the experience of giftedness for sixth and seventh grade girls? Strauss and Corbin (1998) described the initial research question as broad in the beginning of the study and narrowing in scope and specificity as the study progresses. In grounded theory, the data collection and analysis occur in an alternating fashion, with analysis beginning after the first interview.

The data collection for this study began with the first set of interviews. I interviewed each of the participants 3 times over a period of 4 months until saturation was achieved. Following the individual interviews, I conducted one focus group, this focus group was used for both exploratory and confirmatory purposes.

The first step in the initial interview was to create a set of questions that guided the research. The three questions that were generated from the literature were: (a) What does it mean for you to be gifted? (b) How do you see yourself in relation to your peers? (c) What does it mean to be gifted and a girl? (d) Are there differences in sixth/seventh grade than elementary school? The formation of these questions is discussed further in the data analysis section of this chapter. Further questions were generated after each set of interviews was analyzed and areas for further exploration have been identified.

<u>Population description</u>

Participants were selected via snowball sampling, which Patton (1990) described as experts in the field assisting researchers in connecting with research participants. Experts in the field of gifted girls were used to access study participants. I identified two experts. The setting that I chose was a university with a program for talented and gifted youth in the Northwest. This choice fit what Patton referred to as convenience sampling. Patton described convenience sampling as the most common sampling primarily because of access to participants. In recognizing the limitation with convenience sampling, I added additional methods of sampling, such as snowball and confirming, to aid in the trustworthiness of the findings. Conducting the study in person with students who lived reasonable distances from me, rather than conducting phone interviews to obtain a more geographically diverse population, increased trustworthiness. There were limitations to this choice, specifically in the area of transferability and dependability.

I worked with a total of 7 participants; 3 were in the fifth grade at the beginning of the study, 1 was in sixth grade. Given the timeline of the study, fifth and sixth grade at the beginning of the study represented sixth and seventh grade at the end of the study. This grade level was chosen because the literature showed a strong indication that the experience of giftedness for girls changes from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade (Bain & Bell, 2004; Dai, 2002; Kerr, 1994; Rimm, 2002).

Along with the 3 girls in fifth and the 1 in sixth grade I worked with 3 gifted young women who were seniors in high school. These three young women were used as confirming cases. Confirming cases are described as cases that are used to confirm

emerging data and add depth and richness to the findings (Patton, 1990). Young

women who were identified as gifted in elementary school, but are seniors in high

school are likely to have a unique perspective on how giftedness related to their

identity development. Their views were used to triangulate the data throughout the

study, a technique that increases trustworthiness.

Because I was limited in geographic diversity to an area in the Northwest, I

attempted to gain as much socioeconomic and ethnic diversity as possible. One

method of ensuring a level of diversity was to ask the participants and their families to

fill out a demographic questionnaire; this questionnaire was used for selection of

participants only. This questionnaire included information about racial/ethnic identity,

socio-economic status, age of identification of giftedness, current grade level of the

participant, and highest grade level of the parents. Once selection was made, the

demographic data was separated from the other identifying information.

The resulting demographic information was as follows: 6 of the participants

identified as Caucasian, 1 identified as Native American and Caucasian. 3 of the

participants identified as lower socio-economic status, 3 as middle socio-economic

status and 1 as high socio-economic status. 5 of the participants grew up in rural areas

and 2 in more urban areas.

<u>Data analysis procedures</u>

Data analysis in grounded theory is a process of finding themes and concepts

in the data. These concepts are then used to build theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A

primary analytic tool is the use of questions. Strauss and Corbin explained that asking

good questions will enhance the development of the evolving theory. The four

questions that I designed from my grand research question were: (a) What does it

mean for you to be gifted? (b) How do you see yourself in relation to your peers? (c)

What does it mean to be gifted and a girl? (d) Are there differences between sixth and

seventh grade and elementary school? These questions were open for the participant to

answer in whatever way felt real to them, but there was some specificity to them

related to the research question. The data from these initial questions was analyzed,

and the analysis guided question generation for additional interviews. This process of

interviews, then analysis and then more interviews continued throughout the study.

Data analyses were based on review of transcripts, audiotapes, and the

researcher's journal. Transcripts were created from the audiotapes by the researcher

and then checked against the audiotapes for accuracy. These transcripts were reviewed

for themes and for deeper follow-up questions for future interviews. Data analysis

utilized several grounded theory analysis procedures including open coding, axial

coding, selective coding, process coding, and the development of a conditional matrix

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Open coding is the analytical process that identifies and categorizes emerging

concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this initial process the data were broken

down into discrete categories, examined, and used for comparison of similarities and

differences between participants (Strauss & Corbin). It is this process that will guide

the follow-up questions.

Axial coding is the process of relating categories to their subcategories based

on properties and dimensions that emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The purpose of

axial coding is to add depth and structure to the categories. This systematic method of developing and relating categories is an important step in building theory.

Selective coding is the process of integrating and refining theory from the categories and relationships proposed in prior steps (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This method of coding will be utilized at the completion of the open and axial coding. Process coding aids in the refining of theory, by examining any contexts that are an integrated part of the phenomena under study.

The final step in the analysis was the creation of a conditional or consequential matrix. This matrix is a diagram that is created to illustrate the ways in which micro and macro conditions intersect with and interact with the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In addition to the data analysis procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), they discussed two other aspects of theory building that the researcher should be aware of. The first is theoretical sensitivity. "Having sensitivity means having insight into, and being able to give meaning to, the events and happenings in the data. It means being able to see beneath the obvious to discover the new" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 46). Theoretical sensitivity speaks to the researcher knowing enough about the phenomenon being studied that significant concepts can be recognized and at the same time understanding that this knowledge can bias the research. Balance here is established when the researcher is able to recognize biases and review the data with an open mind. To insure sensitivity without undue bias, I kept a research journal that was reviewed following each coding session, and I continued to review the literature for new studies related to this topic. The second area that Strauss and Corbin (1998)

described was theoretical sampling. This process is having a good understanding of the issues for the population so that analysis choices are made based on that knowledge. It is the process of basing future interview questions on a relationship or issue that was mentioned, without understanding their significance. It is also the ability to weed out data that, based on the researcher's understanding of the topic, is not relevant.

<u>Measures to ensure trustworthiness</u>

Having a strong structure for qualitative research, such as grounded theory, is just one of the critical components of sound qualitative research. This section explores trustworthiness and how that relates to the quality of the research. I explain specific measures that I took in my research to achieve a high level of trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness is critical in order to ensure that research is sound. At the most basic level, trustworthiness is simply a way to ensure to the audience that the findings of the study are worthy of their trust and attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness is the sign of well-designed and implemented qualitative research. Because traditional quantitative methods of controlling for internal and external validity, objectivity, and reliability are not appropriate to qualitative methods, Lincoln and Guba presented several criteria for trustworthiness that serve the same purpose in qualitative research. For this study, the methods I included were credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The credibility of a qualitative study is parallel to internal validity in a quantitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility can be understood as how well the researcher's findings relate to the reality of the participants' experiences. Similar

to threats to internal validity of quantitative methods, threats to the credibility of a qualitative study include reaction of the participants to the researcher and the research process, as well as researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are several techniques that the research can employ to increase credibility. They are as follows: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Creswell (1994) also suggested the researcher monitor any biases and be overt about biases from the onset of a study. This study employed each of these methods to increase credibility.

The first of these techniques was prolonged engagement. The purpose of prolonged engagement is "learning the 'culture', testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I worked with the research participants over a 4-month period. During this time, the participants in the study were interviewed individually and together during the focus group. I was confident that my skills as a counselor would help to build rapport quickly and that the interviews would be focused and productive.

The technique of triangulation is a strategy where multiple sources provide additional support for the categories, and theory, that is generated during the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). There are several ways that data can be triangulated. Triangulation procedures for this study included consultation with adult women who were identified as gifted in elementary school, and triangulation with the three high school young women involved in the study. Additionally, follow-up interviews were used to enable participants to support or challenge categories, relationships, and tentative theory. A final triangulation method involved an ongoing review of the

literature, which strengthened the theory generated from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The next technique that was used to improve credibility was peer debriefing. Peer debriefing involves presenting the ongoing analyses to disinterested peers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process opens the researcher to questions. The disinterested peers act as an "experienced protagonist doing his or her best to play the devil's advocate" (p. 308) This process helps to ensure that working hypotheses make sense, point out any methodological flaws, and provide an opportunity for the researcher to express any emotions or feelings that may cloud judgments. This technique can be particularly useful for counteracting researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba).

One other crucial component of credibility is the researcher controlling for researcher bias. Creswell (1998) encouraged researchers to clarify at the outset of the study any personal biases or assumptions that might impact the inquiry. For this study, it was important to be aware of assumptions that I might have related to how giftedness affects identity development. Part of this process is the disclosures that were made in earlier chapters. It was important as I moved through this process to work with colleagues and my advisor closely to help monitor my biases.

When discussing researcher bias, Creswell (1998) acknowledged that no researcher is bias free and that the path to research with the least bias is awareness of biases and acknowledging them upfront and throughout the study. The biases that I currently hold stem from my own experiences and the literature that was reviewed. I began this research with a belief that being gifted is a positive experience in

elementary school, with value placed on intelligence by peers and school personnel, but once girls move into sixth and seventh grade I believe that giftedness is no longer an asset and the pressure to fit in requires a girl to push aside her intelligence. This attempt to push aside a critical part of oneself has an effect on the ways in which a girl views herself, as was true for me and was reported in the literature.

Finally, member checks were used to enhance the credibility of this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described this procedure as the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Member checks involve an opportunity for members to assess intentionality, to address errors, and to discuss the process of their experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This process allows participants to verify or negate the interpretations of the data. By including member checking in the study the overall credibility to the study will increase (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study utilized member checks throughout the process, ending in a focus group for final confirmability.

The next component of trustworthiness is transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability refers to the extent that research conclusions may be applicable to other settings. Transferablility is parallel to the concept of external validity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because external validity cannot be specified by this type of inquiry, Lincoln and Guba stated that the best a researcher can do is to "provide a thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (p. 316). To achieve transferability, I included detailed descriptions of the context of the study, the study procedures, the participants, events, and the setting

to assist others in make decisions regarding the applicability of finding to their settings.

The last two areas that would increase trustworthiness are dependability and confirmability, and they were established together, because they are interrelated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is similar to reliability, which speaks to the reproducibility of results. Confirmability is similar to objectivity, which speaks to how well the findings fit with the research participants' views of reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Together they require that the researcher ensure that the results fit with the participants' intent and that others could replicate the study in the same environment. The most complete method for insuring both dependability and confirmability, outside the techniques already discussed, is the use of an audit trail. The audit trail includes raw data, analyzed data, process notes, research development notes and materials (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This audit trail allows for others to replicate the study and therefore increases trustworthiness. For this study, information needed for an audit were recorded, retained, and can be made available to others for future use.

This study meets the criteria for trustworthy research. Through the use of techniques that promote credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability, the theory that comes from the study not only accurately represents the experiences of the participants, but also provides information useful to other settings and studies.

Methodological limitations

There are several limitations in using qualitative methodology for research that are addressed here. They are: A view of qualitative research being "soft data," concerns about objectivity, small sample size, and generalizability (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative research is still considered less valuable than quantitative research in the research hierarchy (Patton, 1990). There is a bias in the field that numbers carry a view of accuracy, even when the findings are unreliable, invalid or meaningless (Patton). The bias against qualitative research may be a limitation for this study in terms of how the results are viewed. Utilizing the tools to insure trustworthiness combats the view that this study is somehow less valid. As Patton (1990) pointed out, the purpose of qualitative research is to be *promeaningfulness*, where individuals can "focus on important questions rather than, as something happens, focusing on how to generate numbers" (p. 478).

Concerns about researcher objectivity are another limitation in qualitative research. "Perhaps the most common concern about qualitative methods is the subjectivity of the evaluator" (Patton, 1990, p. 478). Subjectivity in a researcher seems to contradict all that is traditional and believed about how research "should" be. Researchers are traditionally seen as objective, separate from the subjects, uninvolved, etc. There is a view that to be subjective means to be biased, unreliable, irrational and invalid (Patton). A way to combat this view is to insure high quality observations and to be fair and consistent. The use of member checking ensured that the observations and theory created were consistent with intent of the participants. Patton stated, "The issue is not really about objectivity. The issue is about researcher credibility and trustworthiness, about fairness and balance" (p. 481). In being aware of these issues and creating a study with strong measures of trustworthiness, I hoped to overcome this obstacle.

The final limitation is related to small sample size and generalizabiltiy. It would have been be impossible to spend several months getting to know and interviewing large numbers of participants. One of the strengths of qualitative research is the richness of the experience for both the participant and the researchers. There are several researchers (Cornbah et al., 1980, as cited in Patton, 1990; Guba, 1978; Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Stake, 1978;) who argue that there are generalizability problems in quantitative studies, even with large sample sizes. "Findings based on samples, however large, are often stripped of their context when generalizations are made, particularly generalizations across time and space" (Patton, 1990, p. 487). They present a view that generalizability is not as crucial, or even relevant, as it traditionally believed.

As generalizability decreases in value, the research community will realize that findings are most useful with regard to the setting and population that the research was based upon (Patton, 1990). My study is applicable to girls who are of similar age, socioeconomic and racial/ethnic status, though the reader must make decisions about applicability. The purpose of the study was to explore their experiences and present the findings as true for them, not all gifted girls. Any findings that grow out of the theory are presented as specific to this population, and speculative.

As I began my research, I felt confident that I had created a grand research question that would be important to the field of counseling. By structuring my research question in grounded theory, the results would be sound, trustworthy, and consistent with the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER IV

First Round Interviews

<u>Introduction</u>

The data were collected by conducting individual interviews with 7 research participants. The interviews were audio taped and then transcribed by the researcher. All transcripts were analyzed using both open and axial coding methods. The open coding was used to create broad categories, and the axial coding was used to begin the process of connecting these categories and to assist in creating a complete and rich analysis. From the data, three major categories that represent the participants' experiences of giftedness in sixth and seventh grade emerged. These categories were related to the participant's view of giftedness, the importance of having close relationships, and the changes that occur from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade. These categories were conceptualized as ***being gifted, connecting,*** and ***changing.*** Within each of these categories, several properties emerged that further described the category. The relationship between the categories and properties grew out of the axial coding process.

Being gifted

The first category to emerge, from the initial interviews, was related to the day-to-day experience of giftedness and how giftedness affects participants' lives. Participants described their experiences both academically and socially related to what it is like to be gifted. ***Being gifted*** was defined as the participants' experience of giftedness, such as what it is like to be smarter than others, how they define giftedness, and what it is like to worker harder than others. Being gifted also seemed to relate to

the ways in which they see themselves. ***Being gifted*** appears to be central to their daily experiences, both in and out of the classroom. Out of a deeper level of analysis of the category of ***being gifted*** several properties arose. These properties that further described ***being gifted*** included (a) ***defining gifted***, (b) ***doing gifted things,*** (c) ***being identified***, (d) ***working harder,*** and (e) ***being smarter***.

Defining gifted

During first round interviews, participants described how they define giftedness. ***Defining gifted*** is related to ***being gifted*** in that it is the way in which they defined giftedness for themselves, and that definition impacted their experience of ***being gifted***. Within ***defining gifted,*** there are several similarities in the girls' understanding and description of what giftedness is. One aspect that arose when talking about ***defining gifted*** is being different in some way.

> P6   I'm smart I guess, kind of like being a nerd but not.

Most of the girls talked about giftedness as being related to the processing of information, learning faster, being more advanced, or working harder.

> P7   I guess what it means to be gifted is taking a little bit more responsibility for your academics, maybe working a little harder, putting in that extra effort saying I have met the bare minimum requirement.

> P3   …it means that I process information differently and I can pick stuff up faster that others, so you learn stuff faster than other kids.

Participants also described the experience of ***defining gifted*** about being smarter than others in relation to the level of schoolwork they do and in a general sense.

P1 …and I guess, I don't know it originally meant that I was like super smart, I learned about it in like second grade.

P4 …for me being gifted in sixth or seventh grade would be to be up a level, more advanced in subjects.

P5 …like really good at something.

There were several distinct aspects in the ways in which the participants *define gifted*. For some of the girls, the definition was just about their own intelligence. For others, it was based on other people such as being better at something, like processing information, or learning faster.

Doing gifted things

The participants described being aware of *being gifted* primarily when they are *doing gifted things.* The property of *doing gifted things* was defined as the activities that the participants have access to because of their giftedness, such as special school programs, summer programs etc. In this property, *doing gifted things,* most of the girls talked about their programs using the words special or different or additional.

P1 I did a lot of special programs. It was kind of like I got to go to special camp because I was really smart and there were actually I think four or five TAG students in my class. I was in a dual language class and we did half day in English and half day in Spanish.

P1 So I did (Names two programs) and did some of their stuff. I guess I was always in the top of the math lab and did my own math class with two other guys.

P1 I went to all the like gifted girls things. I still have books on my book shelves from like conferences and stuff that I haven't ever read, but I guess it was different, but I don't remember anything earth shattering about it.

All of the participants participated in special summer programs or classes. Most of the schools do not have any programs in place for the participants, so their opportunities came in the form of summer activities or by being given more work.

P2   Well last year I got to do (names summer program for gifted students) and I just got done with (names summer program for gifted students).

P2   …for summer I rode a bus for two weeks….and it is not really like school because it is a lot easier.

P4   Like in math and stuff they would not have higher-level work for me to do, but they would give me more work.

P5   I think they will put me in a higher group for math or reading.

P4   …in the summer I did (names summer program for gifted students) and in elementary school I did (names summer program for gifted students) in summer. I did not have any special programs in my school.

P1   In sixth grade we didn't take math from our teachers anymore. We had our own math book that we did a couple of times a week, and then we would play a math computer game, because they didn't have anything else for us to do.

All of the participants discussed **being gifted** as providing them an opportunity to **do gifted things.** The opportunity to participate in unique experiences likely contributes to their sense of **being gifted**, but the extent to which this is true was not clearly described at this point in the process.

<u>Being identified</u>

The process of **being identified** was defined as the actual identification of giftedness made by the school. This property adds another aspect to the category **being gifted**. While only two of the participants talked about the process of being identified, it is an aspect of being gifted, as it leads to all other facets of being gifted. For one of

the participants, the process of identification came from standardized test scores, and,

for the other one, it was related more to ability.

> P1   I guess when I was first identified as gifted I was like really little, second grade probably. All the standardized tests I got really high scores. They were like "oh you're gifted" and that kind of thing.

> P2   Well I had an idea, but I was considered TAG like in kindergarten for being on like a first grade level. So I kind of always was. Plus my parents are really smart, so I guess it is in my genetics or something.

For all of the participants in the study, the process of **being identified** seemed

minimal compared with other properties related to **being gifted**, such as **doing gifted**

things, working harder, and **being smarter.** One participant described realizing she

was gifted and not really being able to do a lot about it. She stated her friends cared

about it more than she did.

> P1   …it was nothing earth shattering, it was just kind of a realization and then I was like, Oh, well there is not a lot I can do about it. My friends cared about it more than I did.

For the participants in this study, **being identified,** while important, was

discussed less than the other properties.

Working harder

The participants described a property of **being gifted** as **working harder.**

Working harder was defined in terms of the participants comparing their experiences

of how hard they work compared to their non-gifted peers. There were several aspects

to this area. One participant described that gifted students work harder than others.

> P7   …taking that extra effort to say; yeah it only has to be two paragraphs, but to make this a complete thought I need to finish my analysis. It needs to be three or four. So, just putting in that extra time it takes to really get it done.

P7   It was all Tag classes and people generally work harder in those classes, and you have more work to do than your friends not in those classes.

P7   I do see more of a strive, in general, from people in AP and honors. We usually work a little later into the night, or pull an all nighter or really work on a project to get it done and out of the way. They may want to go somewhere, but they are not going to go hang out with friends because there is a big test and I have to study.

Another facet of **working harder** was the idea that gifted students are more focused in classes and more is expected of them. The participants described an experience of gifted peers tending to be more serious and more interested in learning than non-gifted peers.

P4   The kids in the advanced classes really want to learn. They are not troublemakers, and the teachers don't really have to deal with them. So, if I was in like upper math and English arts and social studies classes, so I wouldn't have to deal with them (kids not paying attention etc).

P7   The honors students are expected to do that (work late). You have higher expectations when you are in those classes.

P1   …you want your kid to be one of the younger ones, so they can work up.

There was also some gender difference that was expressed related to **working harder**, a property of the category **being gifted.** Participants described a view that girls tend to work harder and take schoolwork more seriously than boys.

P6   Guys like tend to be kind of stupid. Like not really, like they know they can get good grades. Like one of my friends is a guy and he got an F in math. He can get A's and he knows it. Like his mom got really mad at him, he did not even go to track. I know girls try to do their best because they care more about that stuff. I don't know….

P7   I mean girls in certain aspects may push a little harder, because, as a girl, you know there is a standard, not here particularly, but girls are sometimes looked down upon and seen as less intelligent and so you may push it a little bit. Just because I am a girl doesn't mean that I

don't know things just as well as you, so they might have a little bit more of a drive knowing that they are girl and that they are talented. It doesn't come up all the time, and people may not always expect it.

P7   I am a girl. I can be talented on the soccer field, or play football, or play this instrument. There is an edge, a pull to show that you are just as good, like a little edge to push yourself to prove yourself.

This property of **working harder** was discussed by most of the participants and was comprised of several aspects. This property will be explored more in future interviews, as it seems to be an important component to their experiences.

Being smarter

As participants described themselves as **being gifted,** it seemed natural that they would discuss **being smarter.** However, only a few of the girls talked about **being smarter** and what that experience is like for them. **Being smarter** was defined as having an awareness of being brighter than non-gifted peers. It consisted of, not only getting better grades, but also contributing to their overall experiences in sixth and seventh grade. For the participants who did talk about **being smarter**, it was seen as a sense of pride, feeling power, and getting good grades because of being smart and easily figuring things out.

P6   I am glad that I get good grades because I am smart. It is a helpful thing. I don't get discouraged if I can't figure something out, so it's good.

P2   Well it is kind of cool, because I get kind of like power a little bit. Like I really like being smarter than everybody and like getting to help out and stuff, so it is really cool.

P2   It is really nice, because, when you are gifted, you don't really care as much about stuff. Because you know you are smarter than people

P3   I can pick stuff up faster than others, so you learn stuff faster than other kids.

P1   I always had a 4. I never got anything lower than an A for the entire time. I didn't have to try.

This property has some similarities to the property of ***being different***, discussed in a later section. This property is directly related to their intelligence, and it has more to do with ease of schoolwork. This is an area to be explored further in future interviews in order to gain a deeper level of understanding of the way ***being smarter*** relates to their experiences.

<u>Connecting</u>

Analysis of the data produced a second category, ***Connecting***. This category described the participants' connections with others, primarily friends and family members. ***Connecting*** was defined as being a part of a group that contributed to the adjustment of moving to sixth and seventh grade. Participants described a need to feel connected with others as a way to help them move through sixth and seventh grade. This category is seen through the majority of the interview data with a central theme that having a small group of friends helped them feel normal and a part of something. Participants described connection in terms of their relationship with peers, both gifted and non-gifted, the way they fit in at school, and having an awareness of ways in which they are different, particularly relating to social relationships. The specific properties that further describe this category were (a) ***fitting in with gifted peers***, (b) ***fitting in with non-gifted peers***, (c) ***being active in school***, (d) ***feeling connected***, (e) ***being different*** and (f) ***being a normal kid***.

<u>Fitting in with gifted peers</u>

Participants expressed their view of the importance of ***fitting in with gifted peers***. This property was defined as having classes and doing social activities with

peers who had also been identified as gifted. The participants' descriptions centered on

being with the same group of friends in classes from early on and how important that

was for their development.

P1   And I was in the younger class, and I was always in the younger group
      and with other people who were gifted too. They were always in the
      younger group too. I have known them all for a really long time now.
      We all progressed together.

P1   I had my group already established. I mean there were people out of the
      group, but my basic group was pretty much the same as the one in
      elementary school, the same kids I played with and stuff like that.

The participants expressed feeling connected, similar, and normal when they

were with their central group of gifted friends.

P1   I had a group of friends that I kind of stuck with from junior high, from
      the beginning of seventh grade. All the way through freshman year, and
      I am still friends with some of them. But, there were probably four girls
      who were gifted who were kind of in that group and then three guys
      who were also at that same level, and so, we weren't really good
      friends, because in junior high you're still split up girls and guys
      friends, but in general we were somewhat friends, and then in high
      school they were part of my group. And so I didn't, I don't think it
      affected me as much, because I had a lot of people around me who
      were also gifted and I have known them all since I was young. I mean
      really little like a second grader.

P1   I was with like six other gifted kids. So, for me it was normal, or fairly
      normal…

P1   …I knew kids like me who were cool.

P2   To know more people that are like you than just a couple of kids. It is a
      lot easier.

P7   Most of my friends are TAG, or honors. I am not entirely sure what the
      definition for TAG is, but most of my friends have been in the honors
      classes.

P7   Lots of kids that are just like you.

Participants also described having an easier time relating to gifted peers.

P2   It is really easy if you know somebody else is gifted, because it is easier to relate to them.

It was clear that being with other gifted peers provided normalcy and a sense of connection that these participants expressed as positive.

Fitting in with non-gifted peers

Another aspect of the category *connecting* is the property *fitting in with non-gifted peers*. The participants defined this property as connections with peers who are not gifted. The gifted population is relatively small and the participants described the importance of getting along with others. The first area that was described relates to the social changes that occur in sixth and seventh grade and the confidence with which the participants approach the social changes.

P4   Socially there were a lot of things different, because you had all these new kids that you didn't know. You had all these kids coming from other schools. So there was a lot of other, not really fighting, but people thinking "we are better than you because we came from this school not that school" so it was kind of just like little cliques. That kind of went away more through the year. Just at the beginning it was like "I don't want to talk to you because I don't know what is going on" or whatever. Once we all got to know each other in the classes, that all went away.

P7   Socially um there are dances. People hold hands. You start seeing that and I think that can be a challenge. You have so many emotions and you can't always identify them. I have no idea what I am feeling right now. I am happy. I am sad. I am ecstatic. I am nervous. I am laughing and crying, and you don't always know and you don't know how you feel about other people.

P2   I think it is going to be a lot easier for me, because I am really social. I like to talk to people and stuff like that. With a bigger class, I think it will be a lot easier to talk to more people and stuff like that. When I was little, I would meet people at the swimming pool. My dad would take me, but he doesn't like to swim and I love to swim and I would just meet people and be friends.

P4   I had a lot of different, I have always been easy to make friends with and so I have had a lot of different like groups of friends….In middle school I had more like one main group of friends that I hung out with, but I still talked to everyone, too.

The participants also expressed some gender difference in terms of viewing girls as being more social and feeling more of a drive to fit in. It was expressed that boys did not seem to feel that same pressure to fit in.

P1   The girls tried to fit in more. The guys didn't. Well I don't know if they didn't care, but it appeared that they didn't care. Maybe that was just me being a girl and very introspective.

There was also an expression of a need to minimize giftedness, one stating that fitting in was more important that being smarter. Some participants expressed not sharing grades with all friends so they would not feel bad about how they did. There was also a sense that all of their peers worked hard, regardless of their gifted status and that giftedness does not come up with relationships.

P1   Well my friends would be like, "oh I got a B' or "oh I got a C" and I would be like oh I am not going to talk about my grades, because like I don't want to make other people feel bad. So, I didn't avoid, well I kind of avoided talking about it. If it came up with my good friends, then I didn't have trouble talking about it. But if it was just a general class discussion, I would, I don't know, I wouldn't avoid it because I felt self-conscious about it. I didn't really want to make people feel bad.

P1   …the social stuff was more important than being a lot smarter than other people. I think I have always been, like even now a very active, social person, like a social butterfly. I have a lot of different friend groups, I have a lot of friends from different things and so that is when

I started making all those different friend groups. I have friends from volleyball, friends from cheerleading, friends from yearbook….

P6   I don't really think much of it, because there are a lot of people at my school that are talented and gifted and um like half the people. So, I just feel that I am not really special in any way, so it's good.

P6   …there is not like discrimination against the unsmart people, so it's good.

P6   We all get along the same.

P7   I have friends that are not, and we get along just as well and they work just as hard. When I look at peers in general, I look at more honors vs. the not honors.

P7   …in terms of being smarter or you're not as smart, or you don't work as hard, that never entered, at least in my mind. It didn't seem to come up. Like we would talk about what we were doing in class and what are you guys doing in class. You guys have more work than we do and things like that. But, it never affected friendships.

P4   I saw myself as just the same as them. I didn't think of me as different. I guess it did not cross my mind at that age that I was any better or smarter than them. It didn't really seem like a big deal. It was just like I went to camp in the summer time that they did not go to. It wasn't really anything like "I am smarter that you or anything."

P6   I think I would feel left out if I was the only one in my group of friends that wasn't TAG or something. But, we know if people are TAG, but we don't really make a big deal out of it. So, it is good.

This property was one with the most discussion around it, thus is obviously important to the participants and their experiences. This area was explored in greater depth during the following round of interviews.

Being active in school

Participants described another property of *connecting* as *being active in school*. This property was defined as doing activities at school. Several of the participants expressed *being active in school* in terms of sports, cheerleading, student

government etc. This activity appears to have helped the girls feel connected to the other students in the school and helped elevate their social status. There was also some gender difference reported in the level of activity in which the participants engaged. While not all of the participants discussed extra-curricular activities, all but one of them participated in sports, and most of them in multiple activities.

> P1   I played sports. I did volleyball both seventh and eighth grade year, and I have friends that I hung out with. The volleyball team is a mix of a lot of different people; athletic kids come from different groups. And, well that was interesting… It was really interesting mix of the kids who were really popular and the kids who knew other things that would help them get on, like dance or gymnastics. It was an odd mix, but it was fun.

> P4   Some of the gifted guys would be into school and wouldn't do anything else besides schoolwork. Like they wouldn't hang out with friends until they got that done. And girls I think it is more, like I got it done, but I would have the after school life, too. Like the guys they were not like that. They would do sports, but they would come home right after and do their homework and not do anything else.

> P1   I think the fact that I played volleyball, and was on the cheerleading squad, and the yearbook staff. I was a little overachiever. I still did 4H and a lot of other things helped me.

This is another area that had minimal discussion, but seemed important to understanding their experience and was explored in future interviews.

Feeling connected

The property of *feeling connected* was defined as having a sense of belonging or group of friends. It adds depth to the category of *connecting*, as it is related to the emotional sense of belonging. The participants talked about having a small group of friends; several of them used the term connected. Having friends seemed to be important for having people to talk to when issues arose. Several of the participants reflected that there are difficult times in sixth and seventh grade and that it can be

emotional. Having a group that knows them and accepts them seems to help them get

through those times. ***Feeling connected*** did not seem to be related to being smart, just

related to having close friends.

> P2 …because there are only two girls in my school including me. A lot of the boys are going there, so I will know most of them. I also know a lot of people from my church that are going there, so it won't be as hard (the transition to the new school).

> P4 I just had a smaller group that I did stuff with after school.

> P4 … I would tell them things that were going on. They were just friends. I guess they would just be there if I had anything I needed to talk about they would be there.

> P4 I have a whole bunch of really close friends.

> P5 We like walk around and talk about stuff.

> R So your small group of close friends will be with you? Does that help you feel good about the transition?
> P5 Yeah

> P6 I have had the same group of friends all through.

> P6 One of my best friends moved in and we were friends from first to fifth grade and then she moved to Saudi Arabia. And then this year somebody else came in and like two people left because they didn't like one of my other friends. So, it like changes, but there is a group of us that we know we will stay together.

> P6 It helps you feel more connected to your friends, because you know all the stupid things they have done or the weird things they have done. You also know what type they are, like if they are adventurous or really, really social so…

> P7 …friends play a really important role in helping you understand all the changes you are going through. Having a good group of friends that you can talk to like "I don't know what I am feeling, or this just happened to me". Having a good support group with family or friends, a teacher or counselor, even a pet that can't say anything back to you, just being able to let it out. Um, it is a hard transition and I think some people make it easier than others and I don't know why. Maybe it is because one has a better support base,

P7   I am talking about having like two really great friends that you can talk to. Like I have a small group of close-knit friends. They were really supportive; you always knew they were there. I also have a really supportive family. For anything that you want, they would help. Like ok we can do this. We will do this, then move on. If you want it to happen, we can make it happen. So, I think having a support system makes a bit difference with the transition.

The property of *feeling connected* was discussed by all of the participants, and thus appears to be an important aspect of *connecting*. The property was explored in more depth during other interviews in order to fully understand its significance.

Being different

The next property of *connecting* is *being different. Being different* was defined in two ways. The first is being different academically. All of the participants talked about having some type of difference in terms of academics. Most of them expressed having more schoolwork or a higher level of schoolwork. Several of them talked about special apprenticeships or taking standardized tests at much younger ages. Most of the participants expressed that their schoolwork comes easy and that they often get very high grades without having to work hard for them. This ease of schoolwork also sets them apart from their non-gifted friends. This difference they feel, may be related to the property of *being smarter* in the category of *being gifted*. The relationship was explored more in future interviews.

P1   I took the SAT for the first time in seventh or eighth grade. And I mean that was like a thing only a certain number of people got to do. There were like four of us little ones, taking the SAT with all the high schoolers, and we were like "hmmm we're kind of young".

P1   Your grades matter more, and I did not have to try for them. I still got like 110% in my math class. I was in the highest math class I could be in and I didn't have to try….That I guess made me realize how much more ahead I was.

P1   I always had a 4. I never got anything lower than an A for the entire time. I didn't have to try.

P4   …we had some advanced classes too, but they were not for kids who were told they were gifted… just if they were at that level.

P7   Because they are more advanced, 5 more minutes for them might have a little bit more than 5 minutes of a regular student. Although, it depends on how hard you work.

P7   I remember for fifth grade I got put in a class and I wasn't challenged, I was like "I'm done" really fast. Like they would give us stuff and say this is what you are working on until you finish or for homework and I would be like, ok no homework. So I talked to my teachers, and they moved me up, and I started learning more.

P5   Like if you are reading a book and have it at 3.1 or 7 or something you couldn't read anything really low, you had to be the highest.

P6   …well for math they have different levels, and I am at the top level for sixth grade, was. And then there are two teachers for science. One is the TAG one, and then there is three humanities teachers and two of them are TAG, and I was in the higher classes,

P1   I went to the (Names program) program and took fast paced biology in eighth grade, or maybe after freshman year. But that was also something I got do to at a really young age. I was identified and it really sticks with you.

The second component to ***being different*** related to processing information differently. Several of the participants expressed understanding things quicker in class, not needing the teachers to really explain things, and learning faster than other kids. For some of them, this difference meant having finished the school's highest level of a subject while still having a year to go.

P4   …they would not have to explain things to me a lot. Like I could understand things without having to have them explained to me. I guess it would be like in my classes being one of the top students.

P3   Well, it means that I process information differently, and I can pick stuff up faster than others, so you learn stuff faster than other kids.

P1   We were finally at the top of school; we couldn't go a year or two up.

In this awareness of difference none, of the participants described the difference negatively. The participants expressed liking being smarter and having power with their friends. One other talked about noticing the difference but not really knowing how or if that affected her.

P2   Well it is kind of cool, because I get kind of like power a little bit. Like I really like being smarter than everybody and like getting to help out and stuff. So it is really cool.

P2   It is really nice, because, when you are gifted, you don't really care as much about stuff. Because you know you are smarter than people

P1   but it was like seeing my self in comparison with the rest of (city) like with actual grades in a very advanced class, so it was a pretty interesting change.

What stands out from the data is that common perceptions of girls this age are of doing things to fit in and to minimize differences in intelligence. The participants' statements do not fit with this perception. While they do not brag about the difference, they acknowledge it as part of who they are and how they see themselves.

Being a normal kid

The final property of *connecting* is *being a normal kid. Being a normal kid* was defined as being similar to and doing the same things as non-gifted peers. When the participants talked about their relationships with peers, they talked about playing sports, talking, and doing "normal kid stuff." A few of the participants talked about the stress of sixth and seventh grade. The participants expressed concern about things like being late and not remembering locker combinations.

P1   The gifted kids are not the ones I am really close friends with anymore, but at the time, it made me, like, I wasn't not normal. I was more normal, because in our group of like 15 friends there were like seven of us who were gifted, so it seemed pretty normal.

P1   Being a girl in middle school is hard. I didn't like middle school that much. Looking back on it, I think I wasn't very confident in middle school. I don't know many middle school girls who are real confident looking back on it.

P5   We swim, play sports, listen to music, talk about school and stuff. We wonder what middle school will be like.

P4   We didn't really talk about school that much in middle school. It was just more like social life, sports, boys, after school activities.

P6   We get along good, and like at break and lunch we go outside and play bump or soccer or I don't know just regular stuff. It is nothing special because we are all. Like when you get out of schoolwork and stuff. We are all just regular kids.

There is also a sense that outside academics these girls work hard to be normal and connected. This area was also explored more during successive interviews.

Changing

Analysis of data revealed a third tentative category, ***changing***. This category is defined as the experience gifted girls have as they physically move from elementary school to sixth or seventh grade. It is also related to the changes in academic pressures as they move into higher grades and the extra responsibility that they feel. The analysis process revealed some of the changes that occur during this time. This category related to the transition between elementary school and sixth and seventh grade and the experiences the participants have. Participants described this ***changing*** in multiple ways including (a) ***physically transitioning***, (b) ***fighting stereotypes,*** (c) ***increased pressure*** and (d) ***increased responsibility.***

Physically transitioning

The first property of the category ***changing*** is related directly to the ***physical***

transition itself. The participants described the main changes related to the physical

change of a new school, much larger classes, multiple classes, lockers, multiple

teachers etc. For the two girls who had not yet started middle school, their beliefs

about the differences matched the differences that were expressed by the older girls.

> P2   It will be kind of weird (going to sixth grade), because I have never
> been to public school in my life before, so I have never had a locker or
> anything like that, and I am going to a class of like 20 to a class of like
> 32, so it is going to be really different.

> P2   It is going to be a lot different than just moving up a grade. Cause when
> you move up a grade, you know you are still going to see the same
> people. It is not much of a change. Now I am going to have 8 classes
> for 6 periods, and I have no idea if I am going to be seeing people from
> my school or anything like that, so it is going to be a little hard.

> P2   It is going to be different, because there is going to be more people and
> it is going to be a lot different, just because I have never been new to a
> school, like I said earlier, and it is even hard to know when I start going
> to a different grade because you don't know what to expect. But this
> will be a lot harder.

> P3   …in elementary school, you don't have to go to other classes or have
> different teachers. And in middle school, they are not as hard on you
> like they are in high school.

> P4   …so we had smaller classrooms and no lockers we had to carry
> everything on our backs you know. It was such a big change going
> from one classroom to having all these different classes.

> P6   Lockers, I like lockers a lot. And, I feel more, like I can experience
> different people. Like in elementary school you have like one class.
> You get to know those people really well, but not the people in the
> other class.

There was also some discussion about how the physical changes related to

social changes. These discussions were about changes in topics as girls' get older and

having time to see friends to talk. None of the participants at this point discussed

specifics about social pressure.

> P3   Yeah there is going to be (differences socially). Like when you are
> younger, you talk about different things than when you are older.

> P4   Like generally in elementary school, you had your little group of
> friends, and we only had like 50 kids in all of sixth grade, and when we
> got to middle school it was a really big change, because there were all
> these other kids coming to. It was a really big change, because you
> were an upperclassman and then you were lower like being in seventh
> grade and having all the eighth graders there.

This brief discussion of social changes felt significant, but was limited. This

area is discussed in future interviews, as it seems to speak to issues of connection and

friendship as well as physically changing.

Fighting stereotypes

The next property emerged as the participants described feeling more pressure

to *fight gender stereotypes* and the view of smart girls more generally. *Fighting*

stereotypes was defined as a need to show that girls can be smart and strong and that

being more informed and more driven comes with being a gifted girl. It was also

expressed, as a need to show that being smart does not mean being "nerdy."

> P6   Well because when you think of TAG, you think they are smart. So,
> sometimes people think they are a nerd. So, that is like, I don't know,
> like not really real. It is not like that. It's like smart. A lot of people at
> my school are smart, and are TAG, but they are not nerdy. There are
> only like three people that are nerdy and they know it and everyone else
> knows it, so it's not like a big deal.

> P7   I guess you look at it and see it as another responsibility to show that
> girls are just as good and intelligent at doing all of the careers that you
> would be thinking.

> P7   Like when you are talking about just day-to-day things and you
> actually know what you are talking about. You are well researched,
> logical in your thinking, and it like I have to show myself to people that

yeah I do know stuff. Like that notion that kids don't necessarily know what is going on, but they understand a lot more than you think. So, I have a little more confidence to say, "Yeah, I do know what is going on in the world. I can think about things logically, even as a girl. Even as a sixth grader, or 12th grader, just cause your younger or a girls doesn't mean you don't understand things just as well as others."

P7 I mean girls in certain aspects may push a little harder, because, as a girl, you know there is a standard. Not here particularly, but girls are sometimes looked down upon and seen as less intelligent and so you may push it a little bit. Just because I am a girl doesn't mean that I don't know things just as well as you. So they might have a little bit more of a drive knowing that they are girl and that they are talented. It doesn't come up all the time, and people may not always expect it.

P7 I am a girl. I can be talented on the soccer field, or play football, or play this instrument. There is an edge, a pull to show that you are just as good. Like a little edge to push yourself to prove yourself.

Fighting stereotypes is a part of the category *changing*, because these issues come about as the participants move into sixth and seventh grade. The responsibility is felt at an older age and as a result of moving into sixth and seventh grade.

Increased pressure

Participants described experiencing *increasing pressure*, which further described the process of transitioning into sixth and seventh grade. This *increasing pressure* was related to academic pressure and high expectations. Moving to sixth and seventh grade is the first time students receive grades and have a higher level of homework. Along with receiving grades, there is a pressure that was reported that they receive high grades and work at a higher level.

P5 More is going to be expected of you. You have to try more stuff. And you get grades and I won't be sitting in one place all day. We move around, and, if you are late you get in big trouble

P6 We have much more work; we have six classes and homework in all of them. Like sometimes even PE homework.

P7   A lot more teachers, and more people. I think some people struggle with a lot more people….you have a project here and you have responsibilities in each class rather than one focus at a time. I think, as you are getting older, you have more responsibilities to get your work done. When you are working in a group to make sure that you coordinate with who is taking what aspect and making sure each person is getting their job done.

This area also had little support, but was explored in more depth in successive interviews.

Increased responsibility

The last property that added depth to the category ***changing*** was ***increased responsibility***. The participants who talked about the ***increased responsibility*** focused on academic responsibility. The participants described feeling the ***increased responsibility*** related to homework and group projects. The participants reported a higher level of responsibility to get work done, to put aside social things for work. Several of the participants talked about having a responsibility in group projects to do more of the work because of their gifted status, stating that because they understood more, they should make sure they do their part, plus extra work to ensure that it gets done.

P7   generally making sure that it is your responsibility to make sure that your job is done, and that everyone gets their pieces done and that it all fits together. There is also responsibility for getting to class on time, bringing all your books to class, doing your homework. Wanting to take 5 minutes to have fun and call Jimmy up, but I have a science test tomorrow, and I have to study for it.

P3   Like if you're in a group, you have to do more, because they don't understand the stuff.

This property similar to the property of ***increased pressure***, but the former speaks more to the participants' internal method of coping with the change in school responsibilities, while ***increased pressure*** is more external. Internal and external pressure was explored more in future interviews.

<u>Triangulation</u>

Triangulation provided support and contrast for the data collected and concepts developed during the interview process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the use of triangulation as a means to increase credibility of qualitative research studies. The method of triangulation for the initial round of interviews was literature review. Current literature on gifted girls was compared and contrasted to the categories that arose during the data coding process. The literature review included current literature on preadolescent and adolescent gifted girls, the general experience of being gifted, the role of friendships for gifted girls, and the transition from elementary to sixth and seventh grade for gifted girls.

The broad category of ***being gifted*** had support in the literature. This category was defined as the participants' experience of giftedness, such as what it is like to be smarter than others, how they define giftedness, and what it is like to worker harder than others. Being gifted also seemed to relate to the ways in which they see themselves. This category also makes the assumption that the experience of ***being gifted*** is unique. Levy & Plucker (2003) described gifted individuals as "a distinct population with specific and unique affective experiences" (p. 229). They described a difference that comes with being gifted that has both positive and negative connotations. They described children as having particularly unique issues related to

social and emotional development as a result of their ***being gifted***. They described

gifted individuals as advantaged in their day-to-day tasks because of their intelligence,

a finding that provides support for the property of ***being smarter,*** in that, being

smarter was understood as having an easier time with school work and processing

information faster. Levy & Plucker described gifted individuals as having both

interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges that are a result of their giftedness. Finally,

they provided support for the experience of ***being gifted*** as being unique to gifted

girls. Levy & Plucker (2003) stated, "…the evidence gathered thus far does suggest

that many of the social and emotional challenges faced by gifted individuals appear to

be more pronounced in the lives of talented girls…" (p. 232). The broad category of

being gifted had several properties that added to the overall understanding of the

category.

The properties of ***working harder*** and ***being smarter*** both appeared to be

significant in the overall experience of ***being gifted***. Both of these properties stem

from the participants' views that gifted students work harder than non-gifted students,

and that, because of their intelligence, schoolwork comes easier and they tend to work

beyond what has been assigned. These characteristics are supported by research

conducted by Schuler (2002). Schuler looked at the way in which perfectionism

affects gifted students. The participants did not specifically discuss perfectionism, but

Schuler's findings support the experiences that the participants described in the

interviews. Schuler found that "Perfectionism is a combination of thoughts and

behaviors generally associated with high standards or expectations for one's own

performance" (p. 71) Schuler went on to discuss three components of perfectionism

for gifted students; (a) as a group gifted students tend to be perfectionistic, (b) gifted students are more perfectionistic than their non-gifted peers, and (c) this perfectionism can be a positive component of high achievement.

For students in sixth and seventh grade, Schuler (2002) found that gifted students see themselves as the one primarily responsible for their academic success, and they work with a higher level of responsibility. Schuler described the reasons for the high level of perfectionism including high goals that gifted students often set for themselves; their goals are set based on mental age, not physical abilities (such as fine motor skills); gifted children often have older friends and are "working up" as one participant put it. At early ages, gifted children tend to be highly successful. They often seek out higher-level work to challenge themselves. Schuler (2002) pointed out that perfectionism does not need to be seen as negative, that it can help drive students to succeed, but, as professionals, it is helpful to assist the student in reducing the stress that perfectionism can cause. While the participants in the study did not report feeling high levels of stress, school had not begun yet, so with the second round of interviews levels of stress may be an important area to explore.

The property of *being active in school* also had support in the literature. Milsom (2004) explored the difficulty gifted students have in living up to expectations. Her research described gifted students as high achievers in the classroom, able to express themselves articulately, and setting high standards for themselves. Milsom described a high number of gifted students as being involved in a large number of extracurricular activities, which provides support for the property *being active in school*.

In addition to exploring the extracurricular activities of gifted students, Milsom (2004) echoed the work of Schuler (2002) exploring the role of perfectionism in gifted students, explaining that high standards and high abilities often lead to pressure to be perfect. These areas support the data that emerged from the interviews relating to the general category of *being gifted,* as well as providing additional support for the properties of *working harder* and *being smarter*.

The category of *being gifted* also contained the property *being identified*. As discussed in previous chapters, the bulk of the research on gifted education is related to curriculum development and identification. There are mixed views in the literature about what the process of identification should be. One interesting point that emerged through the interview process is that the participants in this study did not talk about the identification process as having any significant meaning. In fact most of the participants did not know when they were identified or how. These participants contrast from the literature that focuses on the process of identification. These participants focused more on the experience of *being gifted.*

The second category that emerged, *connecting,* described the participants' connections with others, primarily friends and family members. *Connecting* was defined as being a part of a group that contributed to the adjustment of moving to sixth and seventh grade. One property of the category *connecting* was *feeling connected*. *Feeling connected* was seen as the participants feeling as if they had support and friendships. The participants in the study expressed that *feeling connected* was a critical part of moving from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade. Support for this property is found in the work of Azmitia, Ittel, and Radmacher (2005) who found

that friendship changes from early to late adolescence in the level of intimacy, mutuality. They stated that, as adolescents get older and become more cognitively advanced, adolescents are able to reflect on their own behaviors, as well as the behavior of others, and this reflection leads to a deeper level of connection. The participants in the study were already functioning at a higher level and were able to express feeling a deep connection with friends. They could express the need for that level of friendship to help them in transition. This research parallels the level of importance the participants ascribed to feeling connected to classmates.

Azmitia, Ittel, and Radmacher (2005) stated that girls tend to achieve intimacy through self-disclosure rather than shared activities. They found that this method of achieving intimacy can increase a girl's level of support and closeness with fiends, but it can make girls more vulnerable to strains in the relationship. They also found that girls with a higher level of self-esteem view their friendships as more intimate and positive than girls with lower self-esteem. While all of the participants appeared to have a high level of self-esteem, this area was explored further in the next round of interviews. The researchers also found that loyalty and trust and emotional supportiveness were two of the prominent components of friendship. Again, these findings fit with the participants' discussions about *feeling connected.* This *connection* and *fitting in with peers* are important concepts for these research participants and are supported in importance by this literature. This area was explored more in future interviews.

Two other properties of the category *connecting* were also supported by the literature. *Fitting in with non-gifted peers* and *being a normal kid* compared with

several researchers. Reis (2002) found that gifted girls lose their desire to speak out

and stand out as gifted. Several researchers (Bell, 1989; Kerr, 1994; Milsom, 2004;

Reis, 2002) described gifted girls as having to give up their giftedness in order to fit in

socially. They found that gifted girls will often minimize their giftedness and will try

to downplay any accomplishments. These minimizations are a way for girls to

continue to *fit in with non-gifted peers* and to *be a normal kid.* Several of the research

participants reported not talking about grades or schoolwork in front of their friends.

There were also participants who stated that in sixth and seventh grade fitting in is

more important than being smart. What is also interesting is that the participants in the

study that had not yet begun sixth grade at the time of the first interview talked a lot

about *being smart* and powerful, and the participants in seventh grade and high school

talked more about fitting in and *being a normal kid.*

Reis's (2002) research also provided support for the property of *fitting in*,

from the category *connecting*, as well as the property of *fighting stereotypes* from the

category *changing*. Reis stated that gifted girls "find themselves in a world of limiting

stereotypes and barriers to achievement presented by parents, school, and the larger

society" (p. 127). This researcher expressed what is expressed in a lot of research on

gifted girls, that they face extraordinary challenges to fit in and find their place. Reis

described parental and teacher perceptions of giftedness as some of the most powerful

influencers in whether or not a gifted girl will feel good about herself. Teachers'

perceptions of gifted girls are often critical and minimizing. Reis described teachers as

"reinforcing one of the most prevalent sex stereotypes: that males have more innate

ability and females must work harder" (p. 128). Reis went on to report that girls tend

to get higher grades in middle school, but the expectations for girls are lower, and, when they do achieve, it is believed to be because of working harder, not because of innate ability. This finding supports the research participants' reporting of having to work hard to prove themselves. This finding also provides additional support for the property ***working harder*** within the category of ***being gifted***. Many of the participants reported having to ***fight stereotypes*** of this nature. Several of the participants also reported ***working harder*** than their non-gifted peers or what was expected of them. While the research by Reis (2002) clearly supports several categories and properties, it is unclear at this point how the participants' experiences, in general, fit with this literature.

The literature triangulation process provided support for several of the categories and properties that emerged as a result of coding the data. What also became clear through this process is that there continues to be a void in the literature related to the emotional development of gifted girls transitioning from sixth to seventh grade, but what little research there is supports the majority of the findings from the initial interview process.

<u>Discussion</u>

The seven participants in the study were interviewed individually regarding their experience of being gifted during the transition from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade. The interviews were then transcribed and the data were analyzed using both open and axial coding procedures. Three categories emerged from the data, ***being gifted, connecting,*** and ***changing.*** Literature triangulation was then used in

order to support or refute the categories, as well as to provide insight into areas to be explored more fully for greater depth.

<u>Being gifted</u>

The category of *being gifted* emerged from the data. This category expressed the day-to-day experience of giftedness for the participants. One aspect that emerged was that they each understood giftedness to mean that they were in some way more advanced then their peers. All of them expressed a unique way of *defining gifted.* For some of the participants, defining gifted meant that they processed information quicker, and for others it meant that they worked harder and at higher levels than other non-gifted peers. The process of *being identified* appeared to have minimal impact on the participants. For them, the process of identification was not nearly as important as their own awareness of a difference. This finding is interesting as the bulk of the literature is related to the most appropriate way to identify giftedness and how the identification process will impact students. There is not enough information to know if their own feeling of giftedness stems from being identified or from *doing gifted things*.

The participants expressed that they often *work harder* than their non-gifted peers. *Working harder* was understood in terms of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It also fits with the literature related to perfectionism and gifted kids. The research participants reported feeling like there were higher levels of expectations on them to complete their work at a certain level. They also stated that they worked their way to the top of different subjects (primarily math and science) and that they had utilized all of the resources in the schools. The participants also reported high levels of

extracurricular activity and shared a pull to push a little bit harder. How *working*

harder relates to the participants' experience seems significant, but further exploration

is needed to provide a deeper understanding of this property. This concept was the first

one explored in the second round of interviews. The first question generated for the

second round of interviews was: One theme that emerged from the last interviews was

that some gifted girls have a drive to work hard and do well. What is your experience

of being driven, and how does being driven affect you? This question would add depth

and understanding to the concept *working harder.*

This idea of *working harder* may also coincide with the dimension of *being*

smarter. The three girls that had not yet begun sixth grade at the time of the first

interview spoke about being smarter and having power from that intelligence. The

girls who were entering seventh grade, or twelfth grade expressed *being smarter* in a

different way. They shared that being smarter was a part of who they are, but that they

tried not to show it around peers. Many of them attempt to minimize their intelligence

in order to fit in or to avoid drawing attention to themselves. This shift in the view of

intelligence fits with the literature about the transition from elementary school to sixth

and seventh grade. Much of the literature talks about minimization of giftedness in

terms of relationships and fitting in, but it may also fit with how the participants view

their giftedness and was explored in future interviews.

Connecting

This category represented the bulk of what was expressed during the interview

process. This category also represents the smallest portion of the literature related to

giftedness of girls. The literature that does talk about how gifted girls experience

relationships is consistent that girls entering sixth and seventh grade begin to shift their focus from being intelligent to *fitting in with peers.*

Fitting in with peers was reported in several different forms, *fitting in with gifted peers, fitting in with non-gifted peers,* and *being a normal kid.* For the research participants, fitting in and getting along well with others became a priority in sixth and seventh grade. This time is when the participants reported, "fitting in was more important than being smarter than everyone." With gifted peers, they express a sense of normalcy and feeling okay about who they are, yet, with non-gifted peers, they talk about minimizing their giftedness to fit in. The way in which the participants fit in appears to be an important part of their experience. This concept of minimizing giftedness in order to fit in with non-gifted peers was explored in order to generate a more complete understanding of the participant's experiences. This desire for clarity generated the second question for follow up: I have read some research that says that fitting in is important for girls who are gifted and in sixth and seventh grade but can also be hard. What is your experience in trying to fit in?

Many of the participants shared that having a small group of friends through elementary school and into sixth and seventh grade made a big difference in the way they experienced that time. Several of the participants specifically mentioned that they felt *connected* to others and that this connection allowed them to feel normal and be who they were. This desire to feel normal and connected fits with the literature on gifted girls development, as well as the literature on girl's identity development in general. The literature on gifted girls suggests that girls with a higher level of

cognitive ability tend to view friendships in a more reflective manner. This way of viewing friendships also increases the depth of friendships.

One area that was missing from the discussion with the participants and from the literature is the role of family. When thinking about a **sense of connectedness,** it seems that the family would be the first place that this connection would occur. Having family not come up during the interview process may be a sign of where the girls are developmentally in terms of pulling more towards friends. It was interesting to see if family emerged more as the process moved forward.

Changing

This final category that emerged is related primarily to the **physical transition** from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade. The research participants focused on some of the physical changes such as a new school, having multiple classrooms and teachers, having lockers, and having a lot more students around. There was some discussion about the way in which friendships would assist in the transition and some questions about how those relationships might change. What was noticeably missing was discussion about the emotional changes that took place as a result of the physical transition that occurred. In order to add depth to this concept, the next question for the second round of interviews was: It seems like middle school would be a time where a lot of things change. How have you noticed yourself changing?

Other properties that emerged related to **increased pressure, increased responsibility,** and **fighting stereotypes.** The participants talked about having more homework, feeling more responsibility for their academics, and experiencing higher levels of academic pressure. There was also a sense that they experience pressure to

show that being smart and being a girl are not mutually exclusive. Upon review of the literature, it seems that these experiences may be components of perfectionism that the literature described as part of the experience of gifted girls. Though these components appear to be significant, first round data and analysis did not provide a clear definition of the concepts or their relationship to other concepts. Thus, further exploring the participants' experiences of increasing pressure was warranted. The final question asked was used to help to determine if a higher level of pressure was related to having a high need for perfection was: What kind of pressure do you feel because you are gifted and a girl? Where does this pressure come from?

While several categories emerged from the data of the first round of interviews, there were several areas that needed further exploration in order to create a grounded theory of the experience of gifted girls transitioning from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade. The questions asked for the second round of interviews were: (a) One theme that emerged from the last interviews was that some gifted girls have a drive to work hard and do well. What is your experience of being driven, and how does being driven affect you? (b) I have read some research that says that fitting in is important for girls who are gifted and in sixth and seventh grade but can also be hard. What is your experience in trying to fit in? (c) It seems like middle school would be a time where a lot of things change. How have you noticed yourself changing? (d) What kind of pressure do you feel because you are gifted and a girl? Where does this pressure come from?

CHAPTER V

Second Round Interviews

Introduction

Data were collected in this round of interviews in a similar manner as the previous round. All seven of the participants were interviewed individually. These interview sessions were taped and then transcribed by the researcher. Data analysis utilized both open and axial coding methods. The purpose of the analysis was to begin to form a grounded theory of the experiences of the participants. The categories from the first round of interviews were reviewed to determine if they remained supported by the second round data. The properties of each category were also reviewed, and dimensions of the properties began to emerge. Dimensions of a property add robustness to the property that they describe. A dimension also contains its own variation; they have two end points and sometimes contain a midpoint. Several characteristics emerged that further explained the property but did not have the variation that would be required to call them a dimension.

The data was examined to identify any connections between categories and properties. From the first round of interviews, three themes emerged. These themes were *being gifted, connecting,* and *changing.* The questions for this round of interviews were based on these emerging categories, unclear areas in the theoretical structure, and the review of the literature that followed the first round of interviews. The questions for this round of interviews were: (a) One theme that emerged from the last interviews is that some gifted girls have a drive to work hard and do well. What is your experience of being driven and how does being driven affect you? (b) I have read

some research that says that fitting in is important for girls who are gifted and in middle school but can also be hard. What is your experience of fitting in? (c) It seems like middle school would be a time where a lot of things change. How have you noticed yourself changing? And (d) What kind of pressure do you feel because you are gifted? Where does that pressure come from?

After analysis of second round data, the categories *being gifted* and *connecting* were supported. The category of *changing* evolved into a larger context that served as a background for all categories, properties and dimensions. A second context *sense of self* also emerged.

Being gifted

The category *being gifted,* emerged from the data following analysis of the first round of interviews and was supported as a category after the second round of interviews. *Being gifted* was defined as the participants' experience of giftedness, such as what it is like to be smarter than others, how they define giftedness, and what it is like to worker harder than others. *Being gifted* also seemed to relate to the ways in which they see themselves. *Being gifted* appears to be central to their daily experiences, both in and out of the classroom. Participants continued to describe *being gifted* as a central component to the experience of the participants. Though essentially the same, the properties of this category changed slightly during the data analysis process. The properties that emerged after the first round of interviews were (a) *defining gifted,* (b) *doing gifted things, (*c) *being identified, (*d) *working harder,* and (e) *being smarter.* From the second round of interviews, new characteristics emerged, *having balance* and *being driven.* The property of *being active in school* was

renamed, *being active*, and it moved into this category as a characteristic of a new property, *functioning as a gifted girl*. Of the properties from the first round, two were not specifically discussed in this round, *defining gifted* and *being identified. Defining gifted* was not specifically discussed in this round, but it has remained as a property because of its overall importance to the experience. *Being identified* seemed as if it would be an important part of these participants' experiences, but, upon further reflection of the data, it is clear that the process of *being identified* is not significant to the experiences of these participants. In order to create a theory that adequately addressed these participants' experiences, this property was removed.

Several of the properties that were identified from the first round of interviews were supported further after the second round, but, after further evaluation, the properties were identified as being dimensions, or characteristics, of properties, rather than being properties themselves. Two new components of the experience also emerged. The property of *doing gifted things* evolved into a more robust property now called *functioning as a gifted girl.* Two new characteristics of this property emerged, *being active* and *having balance*. After the second round of interviews, the category of *being gifted* had three properties (as illustrated in figure 5.1), several dimensions and characteristics. Those properties are (a) *functioning as a gifted girl*, with two characteristics, *having balance*, and *being active*, (b) *defining gifted*, with a dimension, *being driven* and a characteristic, *working harder*, and (c) *being smarter*.

Functioning as a gifted girl

This property arose from the former property of *doing gifted things* and has a more complete meaning. *Functioning as a gifted girl* is defined as the specific

activities or behaviors that the research participants engage in as a way to provide

normalcy and balance in their lives. This property describes daily choices that

participants make in order to improve their experience. It also includes how they

organize their lives, both academically and socially. On one level, this property related

to the specific classes that the participants are in.

P1   Elementary school classes were six kids that were all gifted, we were split into two grades.

P2   When I was at this school, I was one of the only gifted people, and now there are a lot of people like me. I used to be at the very top of my classes, and now I am only near the top. So that is a lot different. I am also learning something now.

P3   They are all TAG kids in the same class, so it is different because everyone works as hard as you do.

P6   Like half my school is gifted, so I don't feel pressure. Like my schedule says TAG humanities or Algebra A, so it is not a big deal.

At a deeper level, *functioning as a gifted girl* described they way the

participants cope with their giftedness and structure their lives. Two characteristics of

this property *having balance* and *being active* further illustrate this point*.*

Having balance

The participants expressed the importance of having more than school in their

lives. They described a need to *have balance* in their lives. They expressed having

multiple priorities and work to maintain a balance. By having this balance in their

lives, they are better able to manage school and *function as a gifted girl*. There was

also a sense that, because of their giftedness, they have more time to do other things

that promote the balance, such as sports.

P5   Well, I don't get very much homework, so it is not a big deal. I can get my work done.

P7   I would not change what I did (focused on both school and friends) and don't think it has really hurt me. I still did fun stuff. I did it when I could, and if I had something do, I would work on that.

P6   I have to say, my dad would disagree, but I think sports is more of a priority. Like I would rather go to soccer practice than do homework, but I know my homework will get done. And like socially, I know I will get my homework done, because I am not going to stay at my friend's house until 10:00 at night. So, it all equals out and feels good.

P4   You need to be able to balance everything in life and not just have one thing you focus on.

P4   …it helped in middle school, even without a lot to balance. It helped having things balanced out like sports and stuff.

P7   I became more driven finding what I was interested in and what I wanted to focus on, the kinds of thing that made me happy and doing a bunch of things. I enjoyed and worked harder for those.

P4   I always wanted to have fun in life…I knew, this is also from my parents that school comes first, but you need to make time for fun, work, and sports.

Being active

A second characteristic of this property, ***being active,*** moved from being a property of ***connecting***, to being a characteristic of ***functioning as a gifted girl.*** This property was originally called ***being active in school.*** The name of this property changed to be more inclusive of all activities that the participants are involved in, some of which are not school activities. The participants described this characteristic as participation in sports or school activities as a way to cope with their giftedness. By ***being active,*** they can be seen as more than just gifted, are able to add some normalcy to their lives, and are better able to fit in.

P1 I was not the most popular girl, but I fit in because of the activities I did. With those activities, it was easier, because I met all kinds of different people.

P1 Absolutely, definitely it was the activities that helped me. I wouldn't have had my friends and would not have fit in as well without them.

P6 Well, like in fifth grade I did not have as many goals. Like I want to have good grades now, and soccer is competitive soccer rather than where everyone gets to play. So, soccer is more competitive and important.

P1 Yeah, some of my friends did struggle to fit in. It really mattered how hard you tried to fit in. If you didn't try, it didn't come naturally. I was one of the more social outside of our group. I did everything I could outside of school.

Being active, like many of these properties, dimensions, and characteristics had a strong relationship to the properties from other categories. Those relationships are discussed later in the chapter.

Defining gifted

The next change in the category of *being gifted* was that *defining gifted* emerged as a property with one dimensions, *being driven* and one characteristic *working harder.* The characteristic *working harder* was identified as a property after the first round of interviews. It eventually moved to be a part of *defining gifted,* because the action of *working harder* is a defining characteristic of the participants' definition of gifted. *Defining gifted* continued to be defined as how the participants define giftedness, but this definition evolved as a deeper way to understand their giftedness in terms of how it affects them. The way they defined giftedness for themselves provided a framework for their identity as a gifted girl. This category was also related to the overall context of *sense of self*. The way the participants viewed

giftedness impacts the way they see themselves and their behaviors. The dimension *being driven* and characteristic *working harder* further describe how the participants see giftedness and themselves as gifted.

Being driven

The participants described *being driven* as an internal desire to do their best. Participants discussed being driven without judgment and as a normal part of giftedness. They did not report feeling any particular pressure to do well, and in fact, for most of them the work was easy. However, there seemed to be a need to do the best that they could. They talked about this drive to do well being a result of their giftedness. *Being driven* provides a motivation to do their best and be satisfied with that. This dimension varied with participants expressing both an internal drive and an external drive. Some of the participants reported being driven as an internal process, a result of the confidence they feel because of their giftedness.

P4   No, I don't think (I feel an internal pressure) so, it was just like I would study and do my best and whatever came of it was okay, just part of. Like I feel like that in life in general, like with sports and friends and stuff.

P2   Like I feel like if I don't do well at something I will just know I can do better next time. Like I don't really worry about it. I am not…I don't know what to call it, but like I don't get all down on my self if something is not good.

P3   Yeah, um like you know you can do it, like you just know you can.

P7   I think I became more focused and more driven through middle school. I really started driving myself to succeed.

P7   …gifted girls are more inclined to show themselves that they are smart and they can do it. I have always just tried my best and worked to accomplish what I know I can do and never giving up, and, if something goes wrong, keep trying.

P6   I am really good at doing things ahead of time. So, I got all A's last year, and I just did what I normally do. So, I didn't feel like extra pressure.

P1   Well, I maybe had a small amount about wanting to get A's, but I never didn't, so I don't know. I did put some pressure on myself to do well in sports. I would really push myself to do well. I still do.

P7   I could not be average, had to go above and beyond the basics, always do extra and put extra effort in and work hard at it. Looking back, I don't think there was an outside pressure to do that. I knew I could and put that pressure on myself. It made me push what I could do and accomplish.

There was also an external drive expressed by the participants. This drive was a result of a desire to prove themselves, to get good grades, or to please others. They experience a drive to ensure that their work gets done, often ahead of time and a desire to do more than was assigned.

P1   I never really felt any pressure, because I didn't have to try, and my parents knew I would always get good grades, and I knew I would get good grades without trying.

P1   Well, the teachers recognized that I was gifted, but they couldn't do anything, because they had an entire other class to work with. It was not their fault; they just did not have the time or resources to work with me, so there was no pressure.

P6   I try to do well, and I know I can do well if I try, so I think it would be hard to do bad. So, like okay for humanities when it says to do a 40-word answer, then I think I can do that. So then after I do my answer, I count my words and I have like 80. I feel like if I cut it down, I won't answer the question as much, so it would be hard to do bad.

P6   Sort of, like my mom she says, "I want you to try to get all A's. You know how your sister got that one B and it made her feel really bad because she got a 3.98 instead of a 4.0?" So, I guess there is a little pressure, but it is not bad. Like I try to push myself a little to make sure I get good grades.

P3   I want to do things really, really well, because like I am in a TAG humanities class, and she would know if I was not working up to expectations.

P7   I did not feel pressure from the teachers, but when you are talented, you know they expect more, but there was acknowledge that the teachers know we are talented and we need to show them that we are and that we push ourselves and try harder.

P7   Because I was gifted, being in the TAG classes they expect more of you. Your teachers know that you are gifted, and they expected more quality and higher quality of work for those students' verses students not identified as talented. That puts pressure to make sure you always worked extra hard on projects.

P3   Yeah, being TAG, you want to do really well and work hard.

There was some variation between participants about the extent of the external pressure that is felt, however there was consistency among all of the participants that there is some higher level of expectation that they experience as a result of their giftedness, and the higher level of expectation contributed to an external drive to do well.

Working harder

Working harder is a characteristic of the property **defining gifted.** Working harder is different from **being driven,** as it is more directly related to the work that they do, rather than an internal or external drive. **Working harder** provided support for their identity as gifted and helps them live up to the expectations of others and themselves. The participants expressed an awareness that they **work harder** in school as a result of their giftedness.

P7   I might spend more time on assignments and push yourself to put in extra effort for it to be good. Something might come up and you are like I can't. I have to work, and they are like do it later, no. Sometimes you get really busy with school and extra stuff. Sometimes you are preoccupied and don't have as much free time.

P3   Like some kids will slack off and not do their homework, but not me.

P3   Yeah, like I get that (my homework) done first. It's fine that way.

P3   Well, my whole life I have been raised to get my work done.

P6   I get home from school and eat something. Then I do all the homework that I can. Then I go do my sports stuff. And then like the evenings I don't have sports, I might go over to one of my friends houses after school. Then I come home and eat dinner and then do homework.

P5   Um, it seems like you have to work harder, because people know you are talented and gifted. They expect more, so you want to work harder.

P5   Yeah, because I know I am gifted, I work harder.

The participants also described working ahead and having long-term academic

goals that push them to *work harder*.

P4   Yeah I do, and most of it is looking up to my older siblings and my parents. Having them teach me that I have no choice. I am going to college, and, even if we don't have the money, we will get there. Without college, you don't have a good life or strong family. It is just one of those things that I knew I would have to push to get there. Middle school is like the way to high school and then high school to college.

P6   I like to get good grades. And like my sister, she is a freshman in college now worked hard and got all A's and got a scholarship to college. I think that would be really good, because you can get a good education and not have to spend as much money. Plus, like you just feel better.

P6   Yeah, it is really far ahead, but it is good to start now.

P6   I always have time to get my work done or work ahead.

The dimension *being driven* and characteristic *working harder* relate to a need

to complete work on time and at a higher level. They stem from increased expectations

that teachers or family members have of them, and they help to provide support for

participants' identity as gifted. This property also has a relationship to the ways in which the participants *feel connected* to others and make friends. This relationship is explored further in the chapter.

There is one final note about the property **being gifted**. The participants all reported a need to work hard, to complete work on time, and to complete it at a higher level. This need seemed to fit with the literature on perfectionism, yet the participants used the word **driven**, not perfectionist. It seemed that perfectionist might have had a negative emotion attached to it, and the participants tended to move away from it. This drive seemed to be part of their identity, and the participants spoke about **being driven** as a part of who they are. It did not appear to be negative or to get in the way of other things in their lives. **Having balance** began to connect. Several of the participants discussed not letting their drive to do well get in the way of their social or sports activities. They spoke of being confident that they could get the work done, and have it not feel overwhelming.

Being smarter

The property of **being smarter** was defined as the way the participants' process information, the ease with which they complete schoolwork. It was their own awareness that they have a higher level of intellectual ability and a different way of processing information. **Being smarter** makes their schoolwork easier without having to put aside other priorities.

> P1   Um, I don't know. I never had to work hard, and I always did well. I never had to try or work hard to get good grades and get validation for doing well. That is why I came to this new school. Before, I would only work about 20 minutes a night on homework, and I would still get all A's. There were no gifted programs at my school, so everything was really easy.

P6   I like to get good grades and everything, um, but like I don't. It is kind of easier for me to keep on task. I get it done, and I usually don't have to stay up late.

This property was carried over from the last round of interviews. This property was mentioned with some regularity but not often. It may be important to their identity as a gifted girl, so this area was explored more in the final round of interviews to determine if being smarter was an important part of their experience or not.

Connecting

The category of ***connecting*** was not only supported during second round interviews, but also emerged as a critical component of the experience of giftedness for the participants. This category related to the way the participants felt about connecting with others and the actions that they took in order to maintain those connections. All of the participants described being connected as critical to their success in sixth and seventh grade. All of the properties of this category from the first round were supported. However, several properties were reconceptualized as dimensions of other properties. From the second round of interviews, three properties emerged. These properties were (a) ***fitting in,*** (b) ***feeling connected,*** and a new property emerged, (c) ***changing relationships***. These properties are illustrated in figure 5.2. The other properties of this category from the first round*, **fitting in with gifted peers, fitting in with non-gifted peers, being normal,*** and ***being different,*** grew into dimensions of the above properties.

<u>Changing relationships</u>

All of the research participants shared how critical their relationships with their friends were in their development and their experience of sixth and seventh grade.

They also expressed how these relationships changed as they got older. The property

of *changing relationships* was defined as the way friendships evolved as the

participants moved into sixth and seventh grade. The participants described this time

as a time when they matured, things that were important to them changed, and the role

of their friendships shifted.

> P3   Well, you talk about more grown up stuff than you do when you are little. Like when we were in kindergarten, we talk about stuff that is stupid.

> P4   Like elementary school was more like playing and not talking about stuff. In middle school, there was nothing to play with so we would sit around and talk. We would talk about school, sports, how games went, boys, other stuff. So, that was it.

> P4   Like then you are just starting to talk about real stuff that is important and like little kids talk, but not about important stuff. We kind of got to let out our feelings and stuff.

> P6   Well, in fifth grade, it was like when you do something with someone, you do things at their house and with a parent there. Now that we are more independent, we might go to the movies or the river to swim or the riverfront. So, our parents will drop us off, and we will be there for like three hours. So the stuff we do together has changed.

> P6   Well, in fifth grade, like no one had boyfriends and stuff, and like now my friends like have boyfriends and are going out and stuff that is different.

> P1   Sixth grade is a really transitional year. You start to notice guys don't have cooties. You notice more about people. Clothes become more important. You have dances. There is also a difference in what you and your friends are doing. Like you might start going out and really talking instead of just playing.

The participants described a need to have a small group of close friends, rather

than many friends, even though the small group might have changed.

P7   I figured out what I like and groups of friend's changes. In seventh one of my friends moved, and I shifted with different groups and found a group that I really like. I still like them today.

P1   In junior high, I had an actual group of friends, the same group that I ate with and talked with everyday rather than just going person to person. I was maybe not more popular, but more in one group rather than bouncing around.

P1   Junior high is more social; there is an entire group of people to talk to. You really start to branch out more, make a new group of friends. There are more kids, so you have to try to make friends.

This change in relationships was expressed as being difficult by one of the participants.

P2   Yeah, I think I just want to talk to people that I know really well. Like my best friend that I have known since I was really tiny is in seventh grade, and sixth and seventh and eighth grade don't really cross paths very much. Like we will see each other at lunch, but right now we have to sit with our class… so there is like nobody I know really. No old friends.

P2   Not a lot of people can be trusted. It is a lot harder.

This change in the level of intimacy in these more mature relationships appeared to be critical to the participants. This change can be seen as a natural progression in the larger context of *changing*. The property of *changing relationships* also connected with the category of *being gifted* in that the participants expressed the importance of having friends who understand their drive and commitment to school, or the ease with which they get their work done seemed to become very important during middle school.

P7   Having a lot of friends who don't really care is not what I wanted. I had a small group that supported me.

P7   When you are yourself, you can find people who are like you. That is when you are happy, when you find people who like you for who you are because of what you think you should be like and how you should act. I think girls start out wanting to fit in, and then I found out that is not important. I found my own friends who love being around you and that helps you. When you are with people who like you for yourself it helps you find yourself, too. It helps me find myself and know what I want verses what society wants me to have.

These last statements showed an emerging relationship between the property *changing relationships* and the larger context *sense of self*. This participant was describing the way finding a group of friends who supported her relates to the way she sees herself. The change is in the realization that a small group of friends who are like her is what helped her to feel connected. Upon feeling connected, she could "find myself."

Fitting in

The next property of *connecting* was *fitting in.* Fitting in varied between *fitting in with gifted peers* and *fitting in with non-gifted peers. Fitting in* was defined as getting along with others and feeling supported by and connected to peers. Part of the experience of *fitting in* is adapting to a social structure that is already in place. The social structure of sixth and seventh grade has a set of social norms that the participants discussed. Part of the *fitting in* process is negotiating a way to fit into that social structure. All of the participants reported that *fitting in* was very important to their experience.

P7   I would say middle school is an awkward time anyway, and you have the feel that you need to fit in. That is true for everyone to ask a way, look a way to fit in with social norm. At the same time, when you are gifted, maybe they think about it more. Everyone wants to fit in, because they don't want to be left out.

Fitting in with gifted peers

The dimension of ***fitting in with gifted peers*** provided the participants with a sense of normalcy about their giftedness and a sense of belonging, even through moving into sixth and seventh grade.

> P6 …yeah, and like three of my friends are also gifted. And we have the same classes, so I could talk to them about homework and stuff, and so it was ok.

> P6 Well, like in elementary school, it was like us, and we were the popular group. I thought so. Now we are like a group of friends. We are not like the three girls that all the guys like, and um, yeah, like we are not the ones who stand out and stuff. It doesn't really affect me because I would not want to be one of those girls. Like people expect so much out of you. And like if you do something, the whole world doesn't know about it, and that is fine with me. So, I guess it has not really affected me.

Fitting in with non-gifted peers

Most of the discussions about ***fitting in*** revolved around ***fitting in with non-gifted peers***. This second variation related to the participants' sense of normalcy and fitting into the social structure that is set by the majority of peers in their environment. For some of the girls it was easy to fit in because of the friends they already had moving into sixth or seventh grade. For others in new schools, it was a bit harder, but a part of the sixth and seventh grade experience.

> P7 In my experience girls, find their own group to fit in with. Like we say we all want to fit in and that means fitting in with the standard group.

> P7 In middle school, it starts who is the cool people…I was never part of that, but I had plenty of friends that I enjoyed hanging out with.

> P5 I will be maybe more popular, because I have more friends to talk to than before.

P4   For me, it was not that hard to fit in. I make friends really easy, and I was, not to stereotype anyone, but I was more outgoing, not shy, not nerdy, I guess.

P3   I can talk to people. I am not shy, so if you are not shy you can just go up to people and say "hi."

P2   Yeah, like I don't know anybody yet, and that is hard.

P2   I also know that some people will not like me and others will, and you just have to accept who you are and stuff. 'Cause like none of my friends are really with me at school…

Several of the participants described taking an active role to help them find

people with whom to fit in.

P5   Well, I have good fun ideas of things to do.

P6   I play a lot of sports like soccer and basketball, and I have friends that I have had since like kindergarten. So, I don't find it hard to fit in.

P2   Well, it is pretty easy for me, because I can draw really well so lots of people like me. So, it is kind of easy for me so that is an easy part of school.

P1   I would agree with the researchers. I cared a lot about fitting in and did activities in order to make sure I had a group of friends that I could fit in with.

There was also a sense that some gifted girls have to work hard to fit in with

non-gifted girls. What is interesting here is that the participants could recognize the

type of gifted girl who would struggle. Most of them did not identify as being that

type of gifted girl.

P1   Yeah, like everyone wants to fit in. You have to try at it. Everyone has to try to fit in, gifted or not. Everyone has trouble. It doesn't come naturally if you are gifted and so you have to try even harder if you are gifted because of being busy with other things. It was also hard for me to understand that people had to try at schoolwork. Some people had to really work at their homework and do that instead of sports, or

meetings, or watching TV and stuff that I could do. The other stuff filled my time, and I met people that helped me fit in.

P4   Some of the girls, people did not want to be friends with because of the middle school act. Like they were always book and always had that weird look. I didn't mind it, because I knew them, but some of the other kids did. I knew like that we were all the same, and, I mean, we were just a little smarter and they just dressed differently and acted differently than me and some of my other friends who are gifted and talented. I don't know exactly what it is, but it seemed like by their looks they did not fit in as well. Even though we were all the same, they just acted more nerdy, geeky, and they really weren't. They just appeared that way.

P4   Just you know, not really talking to people, sitting with the same three people at lunch, not very social, never talking to others, always the ones in class with all the questions. Not wanting to be distracted, and, if someone distracted them, they would say something about it. So it is just, they did not want anything to get in their way, like I am sure they could handle it. They just didn't want to deal with anything.

P6   It is fine, 'cause like I am still not like all brains. Like there are some girls who are like "I have to get my work done," and some people don't like them because of that.

P7   Maybe they are more inclined to do what they want so they don't fit in.

Most of the participants in this study reported fitting in well and having a group of close friends. The relationship between *fitting in* and *functioning as a gifted girl* are explored later in the chapter.

Feeling connected

The participants' description of a need to *feel connected* was the next property of this category. Feeling connected is related to having a sense of support from close friends, feeling included and a part of something. *Feeling connected* is different from *fitting in*, in that this connection was discussed as coming from commonalities and a sense of bonding, rather than being dictated by a social structure. Participants also

described this connection as helping them to discover their identity. This connection

was related to having groups of friends. A few participants mentioned a family

connection.

> P1   It felt really good. I liked having one group of friends. I always had someone to call or eat lunch with. There were like 10 of us, and we all got along the whole time, which is amazing for junior high, but it felt good.

> P6   My dad is really smart like in math. My mom is really smart and a really good speller. My sister was a _____Scholar, so I guess it is like normal for us.

> P4   (My family) we all don't have a lot of problems. I know that has helped. Like I see some of my friends with families I could not even imagine like five step moms and lots of stepbrothers and stuff. Like I could not even imagine having that kind of family. There is nothing wrong with it. I just could not imagine from the way I have grown up. Like I see them, and they are all stressed out because of their family life, and they can't really think about school, and I don't have to worry about that.

Feeling normal

Two dimensions of **feeling connected** are **feeling normal** (replacing being

normal) and **feeling different** (replacing being different). The participants in this study

described themselves as **feeling normal**, which allows them to connect with others.

Feeling normal has a relationship to **being active,** which was explored, but there is

also a minimization of giftedness that one participant described that helped her to feel

normal. Feeling normal further described feeling connected, as it is this normalcy that

allows the participants to connect with others based on commonalities.

> P5   Well, I don't really talk about myself as talented and gifted, so I am just normal.

> P5   Well, like nobody knows I am gifted so I am just seen as normal. So it makes it easier.

P5   None really (pressure). I am not in special classes, so I guess just normal everyday school stuff like the other kids.

Feeling different

One participant shared that she was not taking any TAG classes. She did not tell anyone she is gifted, so she was just like everyone else and was not having trouble. Not telling anyone about her giftedness speaks to the idea that in many ways these girls *feel different.* Their identity with giftedness and their being smart contributed to these feelings. The participants talked about choosing to be normal and appearing normal as a way to maintain connections with others. The girls in the study did not say that they minimized their giftedness, but the ones who were obviously gifted had trouble fitting in. They played sports or other things to blend in more and thus found a group of friends with whom they felt they fit in with. While the participants did not specifically speak to *feeling different* in this round of interviews, it remained a dimension to *feeling connected* and was an area for further exploration.

Context

From the analysis of the data from the second round of interview, two distinct contexts arose. Both of the contexts provided the foundation of the experiences of these gifted girls. These contexts are *sense of self* and *changing*. Contexts are broad environmental or personal conditions that affect all categories and properties and yet are not exclusive to the phenomena under study. Contexts can be considered the framework upon which the process under study is built.

<u>Sense of self</u>

Sense of self is defined as having a unique identity, an understanding of the self. This identity and understanding of the self is the lens through which all experiences are understood. The participants in this study described their *sense of self,* contributing to their relationships, how they do their schoolwork, and how they achieve balance in their lives. This sense of self cannot be separated from the other categories and properties. Forming an identity is the process of understanding oneself. It encompasses everything in an individual's life, including an identification of gifted. The way one sees oneself stems from family, school, society, etc. For gifted girls the way that they interact in school has a great deal to do with their giftedness. The choices that these girls make to set aside their giftedness to fit in, to define giftedness in the way that is meaningful for them, etc., all stem from their individual self-concepts. This self-concept can be seen throughout the interview data.

Several of the girls discussed learning more about who they are and having a strong identity, which contributed to the way in which they found themselves *connecting* with others.

> P4   For me, it was not that hard to fit in. I make friends really easy, and I was, not to stereotype anyone, but I was more outgoing, not shy, not nerdy, I guess.

> P3   I can talk to people. I am not shy, so if you are not shy you can just go up to people and say "hi."

There were several girls who discussed the understanding that some people will like them, others will not and they needed to stay true to who they are and that they would be okay.

P7   In middle school, it starts who is the cool people…I was never part of that, but I had plenty of friends that I enjoyed hanging out with.

P2   I also know that some people will not like me and others will, and you just have to accept who you are and stuff. 'Cause like none of my friends are really with me at school…

Another participant expressed how important it was to know she is and to find people to connect with who will support her sense of self. She expressed that for her experience, being herself, was much more important than fitting in with the entire school based on peer pressure to conform.

P7   When you are yourself, you can find people who are like you. That is when you are happy, when you find people who like you for who you are, because of what you think you should be like and how you should act. I think girls start out wanting to fit in, and then I found out that is not important. I found my own friends who love being around you and that helps you. When you are with people who like you for yourself, it helps you find yourself, too. It helps me find myself and know what I want verses what society wants me to have.

All of the participants in the study talked about being able to fit in, find friends, and believe that they have something to offer others. These beliefs seem to be about identity and the process of finding the self through connections.

In general, these participants identified themselves as fitting in by participating in sports and school activities, not telling people about their giftedness, and finding a small group of close friends.

P6   I have to say, my dad would disagree, but I think sports is more of a priority. Like I would rather go to soccer practice than do homework, but I know my homework will get done. And like socially, I know I will get my homework done because I am not going to stay at my friend's house until 10:00 at night. So, it all equals out and feels good.

P7   I became more driven finding what I was interested in and what I wanted to focus on, the kinds of thing that made me happy, and doing a bunch of things. I enjoyed and worked harder for those.

P4   I always wanted to have fun in life…I knew, this is also from my parents that school comes first, but you need to make time for fun, work, and sports.

P7   I figured out what I like and groups of friend's changes. In seventh, one of my friends moved, and I shifted with different groups and found a group that I really like. I still like them today.

The participants also described how their connection to giftedness, as a part of themselves, related to the way they focused on schoolwork and their confidence in their abilities.

P4   No, I don't think (I feel an internal pressure) so, it was just like I would study and do my best and whatever came of it was okay, just part of. Like I feel like that in life in general, like with sports and friends and stuff.

P3   Yeah, um like you know you can do it. Like you just know you can.

P6   I try to do well, and I know I can do well if I try, so I think it would be hard to do bad. So, like okay for humanities when it says to do a 40-word answer, then I think I can do that. So then after I do my answer, I count my words, and I have like 80. I feel like if I cut it down, I won't answer the question as much, so it would be hard to do bad.

P7   I could not be average, had to go above and beyond the basics, always do extra and put extra effort in and work hard at it. Looking back, I don't think there was an outside pressure to do that, I knew I could and put that pressure on myself. It made me push what I could do and accomplish.

P5   Yeah, because I know I am gifted, I work harder.

None of the participants talked about peer pressure or purposefully minimizing giftedness, but, to fit in, they have all minimized their abilities. All of them recognized and could share the importance of fitting in, and being connected in sixth and seventh

grade. Their sense of identity as a gifted girl has helped them through this process. The way the participants' sense of self framed their experiences seemed to be a critical component of those experiences and was explored more in the final round of interviews.

Changing

       Changing was a category after the first round, but, from the analysis of the data collected during the second round of interviews, it is clear that this category emerged as a larger context with which the other categories and properties are a part. In this category, three of the previous properties from the first interviews, *fighting stereotypes, increased responsibilities,* and *increased pressure* were no longer supported. Neither of the properties *fighting stereotypes* or *increased responsibilities* reemerged, and it seems that they were very minor when looking at the entire experience. The property of *increased pressure* was not supported as a property, but was an important component to the experience of moving to sixth and seventh grade. The participants continued to talk about the *transitioning* that they felt as they moved to sixth and seventh grade. Again this property emerged in terms of physical changes, such as the size of the school, classes, and lockers. These changes, although they seem small, contributed to the overall experience.

       This context of *changing* was the embodiment of the experience. *Changing* was seen in the form of a new school and also in getting older and changing physically. This context was the foundation for all the rest of the experience. Without changing schools, getting older, changing friends, etc., the experience would not really

exist. Like sense of self, changing can be seen impacting several areas of their

transitions.

Change was expressed academically that related to the category ***being gifted***

and the increased goals and pressure that the participants felt because of the move to

sixth and seventh grade and to their giftedness.

> P2 When I was at this school, I was one of the only gifted person, and now there are a lot of people like me. I used to be at the very top of my classes, and now I am only near the top. So that is a lot different. I am also learning something now.

> P7 I think I became more focused and more driven through middle school. I really started driving myself to succeed.

> P3 Yeah, it is harder because _____ has higher expectations than my old school, and like they have harder programs and stuff.

> P2 Well, I am a lot more tired, and I have a lot more work to do so I am not getting very good grades, but I try hard. It is just hard. I used to go to _____ and there were only a few kids, and we did not have much work. Now I am tired and have a lot of work.

> P6 Well, like in fifth grade, I did not have as many goals. Like I want to have good grades now, and soccer is competitive soccer rather than where everyone gets to play. So, soccer is more competitive and important.

The participants also discussed social changes that related to the category

connecting.

> P3 Well, you talk about more grown up stuff than you do when you are little. Like when we were in kindergarten, we talk about stuff that is stupid.

> P4 Like then you are just starting to talk about real stuff that is important, and like little kids talk, but not about important stuff. We kind of got to let out our feelings and stuff.

> P6 Well, in fifth grade, it was like when you do something with someone. You do things at their house and with a parent there. Now that we are

more independent, we might go to the movies or the river to swim or the riverfront. So, our parents will drop us off, and we will be there for like three hours. So the stuff we do together has changed.

P1   Junior high is more social; there is an entire group of people to talk to. You really start to branch out more, make a new group of friends. There are more kids, so you have to try to make friends.

As with the context of *sense of self*, more information about the way *changing* related to their experience was needed, but it appeared, even at this point, to be critical to the entire experience of transitioning to sixth and seventh grade, as illustrated in figure 5.3. This diagram represents *sense of self* within *changing* as *changing* is seen as a developmental process that occurs with age and will continue regardless of the participants actions. *Sense of self* is the way that the participants see themselves and this is a part of the larger context *changing*.

Relationships among categories and properties

From the process of axial coding, several relationships emerged from the coded data. Relationships within the data provided an additional layer of depth and a more complete understanding of the experience of the phenomena under study. Several relationships among categories, properties, and dimensions arose, and can be seen in figure 5.4.

Functioning as a gifted girl-connecting

There was a relationship between *functioning as a gifted girl* and *connecting.* This relationship was seen in the way in which the participants described *being active*. The participants described playing sports and being active in school and other activities as critical to managing their giftedness and fitting in. Without the sports and activities, many of the participants reported that they would not have been able to

make friends. Thus, they would not have felt connected. ***Being active*** is a part of how

a gifted girl functions, but the role is to help in her connections with others.

> P1   I was not the most popular girl, but I fit in because of the activities I did. With those activities, it was easier, because I met all kinds of different people.

> P1   Absolutely, definitely it was the activities that helped me. I wouldn't have had my friends and would not have fit in as well without them.

> P1   Yeah, some of my friends did struggle to fit in. It really mattered how hard you tried to fit in. If you didn't try, it didn't come naturally. I was one of the more social outside of our group. I did everything I could outside of school.

> P6   I play a lot of sports like soccer and basketball, and I have friends that I have had since like kindergarten. So, I don't find it hard to fit in.

Feeling connected-fitting in

A relationship exists between ***feeling connected*** and ***fitting in***. The more that

the participants felt like they fit in, the more connected they felt. The participant who

was struggling a bit more to connect and make friends did not describe herself as

fitting in at that point. Feeling connected speaks to having a group of friends to be

with. This feeling of connection can only occur if the individual finds a group to fit in

with. Without fitting in, there can be no connecting.

> P1   It felt really good. I liked having one group of friends. I always had someone to call or eat lunch with. There were like 10 of us, and we all got along the whole time, which is amazing for junior high, but it felt good.

> P6   Well, like in elementary school, it was like us, and we were the popular group. I thought so. Now we are like a group of friends. We are not like the three girls that all the guys like, and um, yeah, like we are not the ones who stand out and stuff. It doesn't really affect, me because I would not want to be one of those girls. Like people expect so much out of you. And like if you do something, the whole world doesn't know about it, and that is fine with me. So, I guess it has not really affected me.

> P7   In middle school, it starts who is the cool people…I was never part of that, but I had plenty of friends that I enjoyed hanging out with.

Functioning as a gifted girl-defining gifted

The relationship between **functioning as a gifted girl** and **defining gifted** was also a strong relationship. The way each participant defined gifted affects how hard they work and how driven they are. Their definition of gifted directly impacted the way that they function. The amount of balance they feel they can allow or the amount of time that they can dedicate to being active is interwoven with the drive that they feel as a result of their giftedness.

> P2   Like I feel like if I don't do well at something I will just know I can do better next time. Like I don't really worry about it. I am not…I don't know what to call it, but like I don't get all down on my self if something is not good.

> P7   I became more driven finding what I was interested in and what I wanted to focus on, the kinds of thing that made me happy and doing a bunch of things. I enjoyed and worked harder for those.

> P4   I always wanted to have fun in life…I knew, this is also from my parents that school comes first, but you need to make time for fun, work, and sports.

Sense of self-changing

All of these relationships are tightly connected to the participant's **sense of self**, and the process of **changing** that they were moving through as part of their experience of sixth and seventh grade. Both of these relationships emerged as the context for which all of the other categories, properties, and dimensions function.

Triangulation

The tentative theoretical structure was again compared and contrasted to current literature for purposes of triangulation. The categories **connecting** and **being gifted** were the focus of the literature review triangulation. The relationship between these two categories appeared strong based on the participants' responses, but, in order to strengthen the finding, the literature in this area is discussed.

Being gifted

A review of the literature regarding social development of gifted girls produced support for several aspects of **being gifted**. In particular, the literature addresses the property **functioning as a gifted girl** and the characteristics **being active** and **having balance. Functioning as a gifted girl** was defined as the specific activities or behaviors that the research participants engage in as a way to provide normalcy and balance in their lives. This property describes daily choices that participants make in order to improve their experience. The dimensions of this property provide specific information about how they achieve normalcy and balance, by **being active** and **having balance** in their lives.

Functioning as a gifted girl

One of the most prominent ways the participants' **function as a gifted girl** is through **being active** and **having balance.** Participation in athletics and other extra-curricular activities have a positive influence on individual's academic achievement, self-esteem, peer interactions, and social adjustment (Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee, 2004). The researchers reported that for gifted students, extra-curricular activities influence the identification of giftedness by demonstrating a talent

that might otherwise be missed. They stated that gifted students are often connected to more educational resources from the parents networking during activities and that student's benefit through mentoring and coaching that often translate to academic work. For gifted students, Olszewski-Kubilius and Lee found that participation in science and engineering programs outside school often lead to acceptance into top math or science-based institutions.

The research of Olszewski-Kubilius and Lee (2004) provided support for the characteristics of **being active** and **having balance**. During the first round of interviews, several of the participants discussed participation in summer programs in the math and sciences and the enjoyment they felt at being in these programs. For most of the participants, these summer programs were the only academic programs that challenged them. Academic programs, not sports, were the focus of the participants during the first round of interviews. However, because the first round of interviews took place at the conclusion of the summer academic activities, and the second round took place during the middle of their sports, it is unclear which one had more of an impact.

Olszewski-Kubilius and Lee (2004) stated that girls tend to participate in sports less than boys and that their primary extra-curricular activities focus on the arts and other commonly thought of "feminine activities." The research participants in this study contrast with this finding in the research. All but one of the participants was involved in sports, and all of the other six participants spoke of sports as being extremely important to them. None of these participants reported participating in exclusively "feminine activities." Olszewski-Kubilius and Lee found that, after sports,

extra-curricular programs in math were the most dominant, but they did not ask about general academic extra-curricular activities such as those of these research participants.

Olszewski-Kubilius and Lee (2004) supported the idea that gifted students are often involved in extra-curricular activities, but they did not address how that involvement may influence the gifted students' self perception, perception by peers, or how those activities help them fit in. Their research, like most of the research on giftedness, focused on the academic and performance base for gifted students, rather than on the social and emotional needs of gifted students. The level of activities that these research participants engaged in is consistent with this literature, but the reasons for their involvement is not. They reported enjoying sports, having it help them connect to peers, and to fit in. It was a way to normalize their experience in sixth and seventh grade. The research does not address this issue.

Connecting

The category of *connecting* emerged as being critical to the research participants' experiences. There is some support in the literature for this category, along with the properties of *fitting in*, *feeling different,* and *feeling connected*. The literature that is related to these properties also provides support for the emerging relationships between the category of *connecting* and the category of *being gifted*.

Fitting in

Fitting in was a property defined as getting along with others and feeling supported by and connected to peers. Part of the experience of *fitting in* is adapting to a social structure that is already in place. Rimm (2002) described five coping

mechanisms that gifted girls often employ in order to cope with what she describes as the "social stigma of giftedness" (p.15). These coping mechanisms assist gifted girls in *fitting in*. These are (a) denial of giftedness, (b) peer acceptance, (c) social interaction (described as the amount that the individual gets involved in extracurricular activities), (d) hiding giftedness (not sharing grades), and (e) the extent to which individuals emphasize popularity. These coping mechanisms compare to the information gathered from the participants related to their behaviors that help them to *fit in*. In order to *fit in* and be *connected,* the participants reported that they minimize or hide their giftedness by not sharing grades or class information with friends. These participants, rather than trying to be popular, found small groups of friends who can accept them. All but one of the participants was involved in sports and other extracurricular activities, as a way to *fit in* and normalize their lives. The participants reported not getting overly upset about not being the most popular girls in school. What they expressed was that having a small, connected group was more important. Rimm's findings provided support and depth to the category of *connecting* and to the property of *fitting in.*

Feeling different and feeling normal

The dimension of *feeling different* was understood as the participants' awareness that their giftedness made them different from their peers. The participants made choices in the way they expressed themselves and the activities that they chose to participate in, in an attempt to *feel normal*. The literature on the social development of gifted girls in this age range primarily reported that gifted girls struggle to develop emotionally and that their giftedness makes fitting in both difficult and frustrating (Kerr, 1994; Rimm, 2002). "Gifted adolescents often value being

intelligent, yet almost always realize that giftedness exacts a social price" (Rimm, 2002, p. 13). Some research found that gifted students often *feel different* and that that perception of difference can often get in the way of their social interactions (Coleman & Cross, 1998). These findings support the property of *feeling different*, and the participants' experience of *feeling different* and their attempts to *feel normal.*

Relationship between categories

The relationships between the two main categories *being gifted* and *connecting,* and the properties and dimensions of these categories, began to emerge with the analysis of the second-round data. Research conducted by Freeman (2004) provided early support for the relationship between giftedness, gender, and social pressures. The social pressure and the need for giftedness to be minimized or balanced with sports and other "normal" activities appeared to be an issue specific to girls. Freeman stated that the innate differences between genders in gifted children are minimal, that socialization and cultural influences have the strongest impact on an individual's development. Teachers who are more aware of the lack of gender difference in ability are more often finding that both genders perform equally well socially and in academic areas. Currently, these gender differences appear to be the most significant in the United States and differ in countries, such as Britain and elsewhere (Freeman, 2004). This interesting finding speaks to the ways in which girls in the United States are socialized. This research provides another layer to the understanding of *being gifted* and *functioning as a gifted girl* and the choices that this studies participants made in order to *fit in* and *connect* with others.

<u>Discussion</u>

Seven participants were interviewed individually for the second round. The data were then coded using open coding procedures and axial coding procedures as a way to begin to form relationships between categories, properties, and dimensions. From this second round of interviews, two of the previous categories, ***being gifted*** and ***connecting,*** were supported. The category of ***changing*** emerged as a context along with ***sense of self***. There were several relationships that emerged between the categories specifically related to the way participants' giftedness relates to the way they fit in with peers and the steps that they take to ensure that they feel connected.

<u>Being gifted</u>

Being gifted emerged as a category with several properties and dimensions: those (a) ***functioning as a gifted girl*** with two characteristics, ***having balance*** and ***being active***, (b) ***defining gifted*** with a dimension, ***being driven,*** and a characteristic, ***working harder***, (c) ***being identified***, and (d) ***being smarter***. This category speaks to the way in which the participants understand their giftedness and the daily choices that they make as a result of their giftedness. Some of these choices included ***being active*** by playing sports, participating in student government, participating in activities outside school, and making time for friends and ***having balance*** in their lives. Another aspect of this category was that the participants felt ***driven*** to ***work hard***, to do well in school and other activities, and to have an overall desire to do things extremely well. This drive places some pressure on the participants, particularly with some of the more difficult schoolwork and higher level of expectations placed on them in sixth and seventh grade.

The participants discussed that one component to **being gifted**, which is related to **connecting**, is sometimes hiding their intelligence, or high scores in school from their friends. The participants discussed a need to minimize their giftedness in order to fit in, but their feelings and experience of this minimization is unclear. It would intuitively seem that putting aside a part of the self in order to be liked and find friends could be damaging, but there are times in most peoples lives when choices are made in order to fit in. This area was still unclear and will be the first focus for the third round of interviews. The question that addressed this issue was: What is it like to make the choice to sometimes hide your giftedness in order to fit in?

Another area that was unclear was the way that **being smarter** fits in to the participants' experiences. It was a concept that was supported through both rounds of interviews and appeared to be important to the way in which they identify and function, but it was not clear how. The participants described this area as an awareness of processing information differently from their peers. It was also the explanation they provide for completing work at a much faster rate with very little effort. It also has a relationship to **feeling different**, but the overall impact is unclear. Being smarter was the next focus for the third round of interviews. The question that addressed this area was: How does being smart affect your relationships (Eg: teachers, friends, family)?

Connecting

Connecting was a category whose properties and dimensions are critical to the participants' experience of sixth and seventh grade. At the end of round two, those properties and dimensions were identified as (a) **fitting in,** with variation between, **fitting in with gifted peers** and **fitting in with non-gifted peers,** (b) **feeling connected,**

with the dimensions ***being normal*** and ***being different,*** and (c) ***changing***

relationships. This category is about the importance of having friends and a sense of

connection with others. The participants expressed that it was often easier to ***fit in***

with gifted peers but that ***fitting in with non-gifted peers*** was more important in order

to fit in at school. Part of fitting in is having a sense of ***being normal*** and doing

normal things rather that focusing on what is ***different***. The final property of this

category was ***changing relationships.*** This property described the changes in the

participants' relationships as they get older and move into sixth and seventh grade.

The participants were clear about the properties and dimensions of this category, so no

further questions were asked related to these areas specifically. It was my sense that

more depth in this category would emerge with the final interviews.

<u>Changing</u>

The context of changing grew out of this second round of interviews and was

seen as the overall developmental and physical changes that these participants are

experiencing. This context cannot be separated out from any of the other categories

and was the frame of the experience of sixth and seventh grade. The participants

expressed changes that occur in relation to their academics, such as having harder

classes, more homework, or feeling higher levels of expectations because of their

move to sixth and seventh grade. This type of changing is linked with the experience

of being gifted, including the way they function as a gifted girl, the drive that they feel

to do well, and their desire to work harder.

Changing also related to social changes that the participants experienced. The

participants shared that their relationships with friends evolved as a result of getting

older. They stated that the topics that they talked about changed, as did the type of activities that they did together. These changes also influenced the value that was placed on having a smaller group of supportive friends, rather than attempting to be popular. These changes had a tentative connection to the way they see themselves, but needed to be explored more.

Sense of self

The final area that was addressed in the third round of interviews was related to the context *sense of self*. It seemed that the way the participants saw themselves could not be separated out from the other two categories and that it was the view of themselves that impacted the way they viewed giftedness, their connectedness, and their overall experience in sixth and seventh grade. The question that was asked to gain clarity regarding this context was: What do you know about yourself, your life, and the things that are important to you? What is it like to know those things? Because of the age of most of the participants, this question was asked in parts, allowing for the participant to explore each of the components individually if needed.

After the first two rounds of interviews, limited theory began to emerge. One interesting component seemed to be that this time of change for these gifted girls might not be as difficult as the literature reports it to be. These participants made choices about how they relate to others and about how to use their giftedness, but, once the choice was made to try to fit in and find a central group of friends, their experience did not appear to be negative. These participants seemed to be forming an identity that was made up of the way they see their giftedness and the way they connect to their friends, and they did not seem to be going through the struggles that

much of the literature reports they should be going through. There appeared to be a close relationship between the way they see giftedness and the choices that they made because of that understanding. There was also a sense that the reason these girls moved through this time well was that they all have a sense of connection to others. Gilligan's work on identity development supports the connecting and identity portions of this research. The questions for the third round of interviews was: (a) What is it like to make the choice to sometimes hide your giftedness in order to fit in? (b) How does being smart affect your relationships (Eg: teachers, friends, family)? (c) What do you know about yourself, your life, and the things that are important to you? What is it like to know those things?

Figure 5.1: Illustration of the category *being gifted*

Being gifted

Functioning as
a gifted girl

Defining gifted

Being smarter

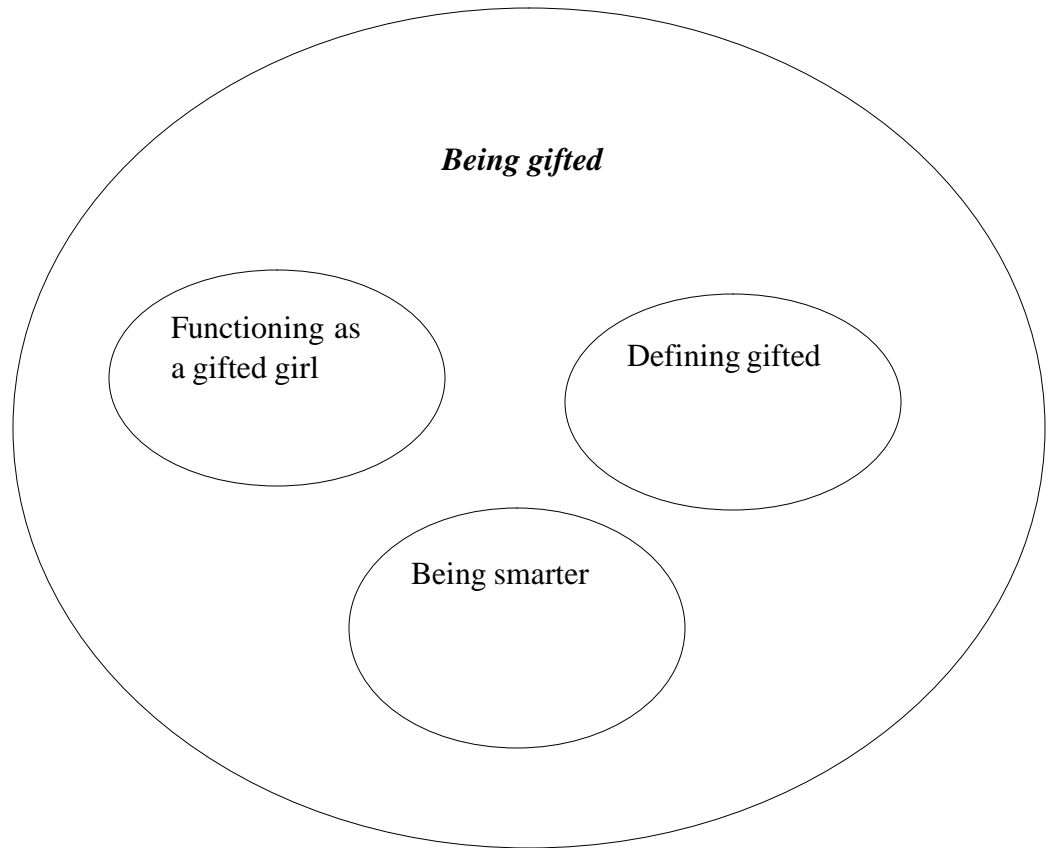Figure 5.1: Illustration of the category *being gifted*
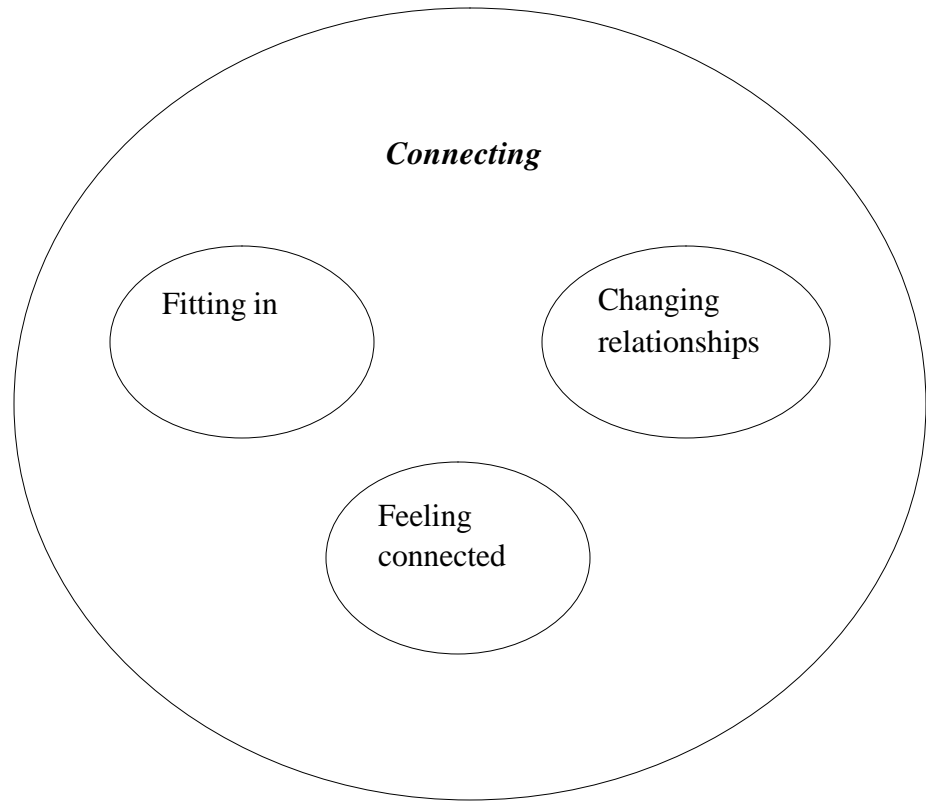
Figure 5.2: Illustration of the category *connecting*.

Figure 5.3: Illustration of the contexts *changing* and *sense of self*

Changing

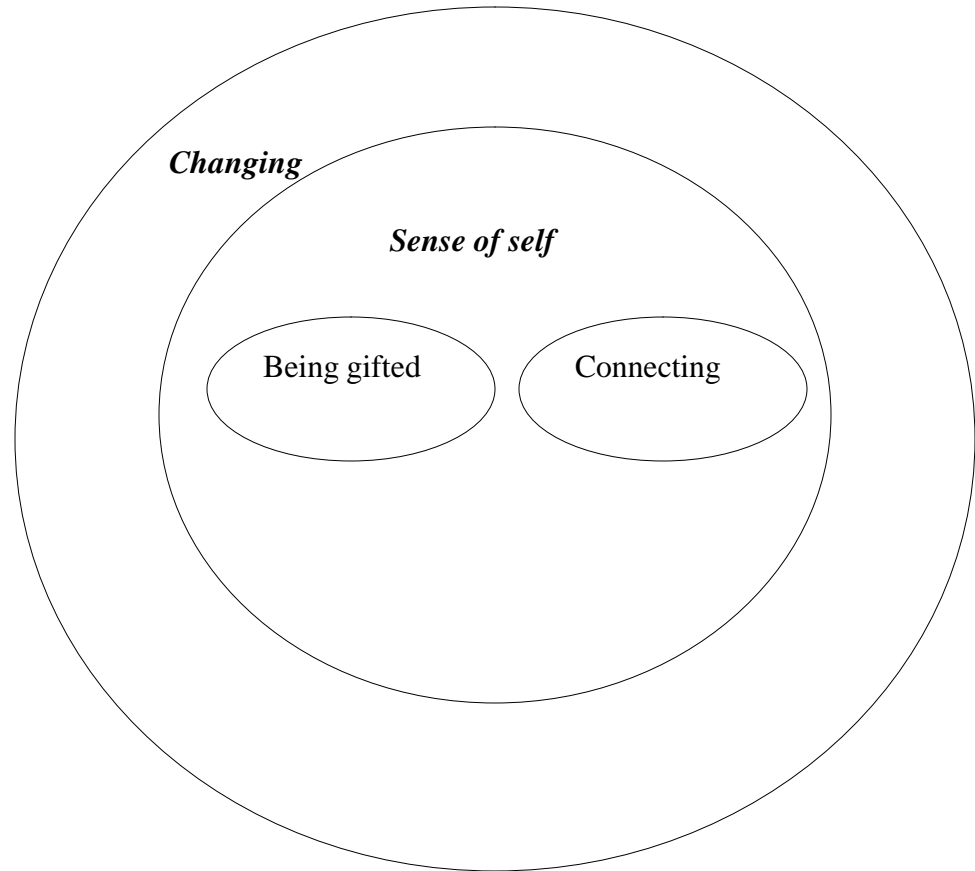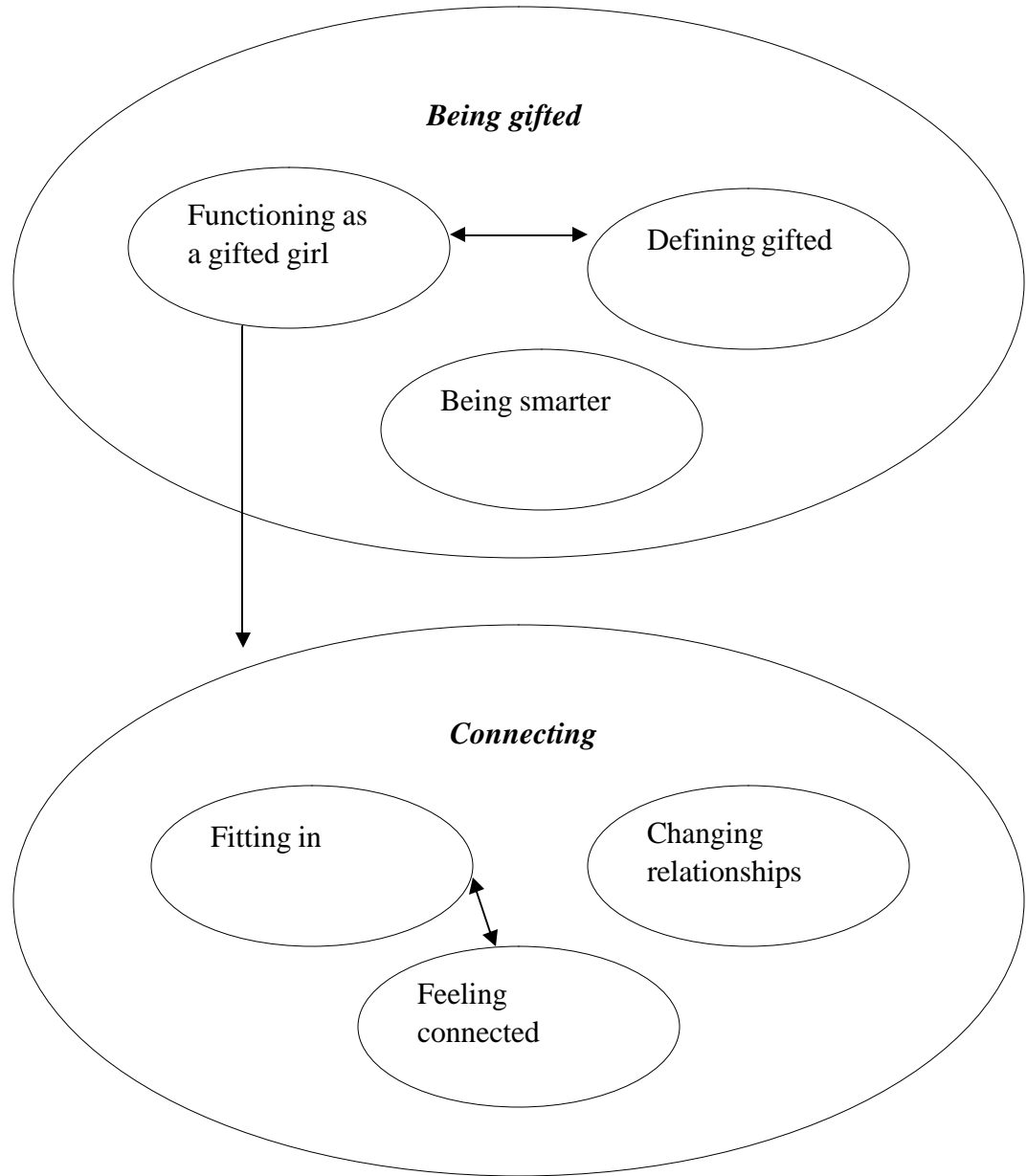*Sense of self*

Being gifted

Connecting

Figure 5.4: Relationships between categories and properties

CHAPTER VI

Third Round Interviews

Introduction

Data were once again collected through conducting individual interviews for each of the seven participants. These interview sessions were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were then checked against the audiotape to ensure accuracy. The data were then analyzed utilizing open and axial coding methods. An additional coding method, process coding, was utilized with the third round of interviews. Process coding identifies the interactions and actions that can alter the other conditions of the participants' experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For this round of interviews, three questions were generated to add further depth to the categories, properties, dimensions, and relationships that emerged from the first two rounds of data. The questions for this round of interviews were (a) What is it like to sometimes make the choice to hide your giftedness in order to fit in? (b) How does being smart affect your relationships? (Eg., Teachers, friends, family) and (c) What do you know about yourself, your life, and the things that are important to you? What is it like to know those things?

After the second round of data was analyzed, two categories emerged, ***being gifted*** and ***connecting***. From this round of data, both categories were supported as being critical to the participants' experiences of sixth and seventh grade. Process coding was also used to illuminate two areas of context that emerged during the second round of analysis and were sustained during the third round. These two contexts were ***sense of self*** and ***changing,*** and they serve as the foundation for all

other experiences. While the categories and contexts did not change during the third round, participant response added depth and confirmed structure. This round also yielded strong relationships between the categories, properties, and dimensions. The role of the two contexts was further identified and strengthened.

Being gifted

During the third round of interviews, the category of *being gifted* was strengthened. *Being gifted* continued to be defined as the way in which giftedness influences or affects the participants' lives. This category is central to the lives of the participants and has an impact on choices they make both in-school and outside school. The properties of this category that emerged from the second round of interviews continued to be supported. Those properties were *functioning as a gifted girl* with two characteristics, *being active* and *having balance,* and *defining gifted* with a dimension *being driven* and a characteristic *working harder.* Also identified was the property *being smarter.* Two characteristics of *being smarter* emerged, *ease of schoolwork* and *teacher relationships*. No new properties in this category emerged. The existing properties, dimensions, and characteristics from round two were supported, and the relationships between categories and within categories strengthened. See figure 6-1 for an illustration of this category.

Functioning as a gifted girl

Functioning as a gifted girl remained as a critical property of the category *being gifted*. This property was defined as the specific activities or behaviors that the research participants engage in as a way to provide normalcy and balance in their lives. This property describes daily choices that participants make in order to improve

their experience. It also includes how they organize their lives, both academically and socially. Two characteristics, ***being active*** and ***having balance,*** remained components of this property. Neither of these characteristics were discussed specifically, but the second round added richness to these properties. The literature review from the second round of interviews supported the importance of ***being active*** and ***having balance*** in terms of participation in sports and other extra-curricular activities. Participation in these out-of-school activities can help to strength self-esteem, peer interactions, and social adjustment (Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee, 2004). Both of these characteristics relate to the way in which the participants fit in with other peers. Being involved in sports or other academic programs allows them to connect with peers in ways that improve their experience of sixth and seventh grade. As one participant stated while discussing her giftedness

> P7   …it affects who you meet. Like what programs you are in. You meet people in those programs who are talented and gifted, so as you embrace parts of who you are, like being gifted. You start to meet people who have those same interests. Like sports or classes you take. So, you start, a lot of your friends, not all of them were considered gifted, but so maybe you just have more relationships and you are placed with those kinds of people in summer camp or classes.

This quote illustrates both how this participant ***functions as a gifted girl*** and how that functioning ***connects*** her to others. There is also a link between the way the participants ***function as a gifted girl*** and the larger context of ***sense of self***. This connection is discussed in further detail with ***sense of self.*** The connection between functioning as a gifted girl contributes to and flows out of the larger context of ***sense of self***. The way that these participants function each day as gifted girls stems from the way they see themselves.

<u>Defining gifted</u>

Defining gifted was supported as a property and an important part of the participants' experience of sixth and seventh grade. ***Defining gifted*** continued to be defined as the way in which each individual participant sees giftedness. It is this view of giftedness that shapes their identity as a gifted girl and determines the way in which they interact with the world because of the way they see their giftedness. The participants in the study described a dimension of ***defining gifted***, ***being driven,*** and an additional characteristic, ***working harder.*** Both of these facets were discussed in the third round as directly stemming from the way participants define gifted.

Being driven

Being driven is a dimension of ***defining gifted*** as it describes a way of approaching school work and other activities based on the participants understanding of their giftedness. This dimensions varies between an internal drive and an external drive. Both variations contribute to being driven but in different ways. The internal drive was expressed as a desire to do well or to excel. The external drive was expressed as a desire to meet expectations.

> P1   Right, like I would feel bad about some things. Like people might say "that is really good you got an A," and I would be like I only got a 98. I should have gotten 102. Like that kind of thing.

> P6   It helps (being driven). My mom and dad really want me to do well in school. My sister is talented and gifted and she got like good scholarships and they want that for me, too.

> P7   My sister is gifted, and my parents are both smart, so it wasn't like "wow we have a really gifted person in the family." I was always just part of the family. My sister was valedictorian and is at an Ivy League school.

P6   It doesn't really help with fit in. More like it helps with expectations, because like they are my family. They would like me either way.

The participants spoke about ***being driven*** in terms of family connections and a push that comes from family out of love. The external drive that they described was not forceful or especially stressful. It was just part of their family's expectations. This drive is seen as a part of who they are and their gifted experience. This drive that was described stems from an identity of giftedness and a desire to push oneself. It is related not only to ***being driven*** but also to having a ***sense of self*** as a gifted girl.

Working harder

Several of the participants discussed ***working harder*** as a part of ***defining gifted.*** This characteristic seemed to have two different purposes. The first was that several participants reported ***working harder*** in order to get work done, to get extra work and, to have fun.

P1   … them giving me extra work was really normal for me. Like I could always ask for an extra assignment...

P3   …I have one friend who never does her homework, and I am like "why wouldn't you do your homework?" I don't really say anything.

P5   It was fun and challenging, and I did not get it right away, so I had to work at it to figure it out.

P7   School was really important. Doing my best and working my hardest was really important no matter how it came out.

The other way that ***working harder*** seemed to serve them was that it contributed to the relationship with teachers.

P2   I think they (teachers) really like it. Like I get my stuff done, and I am not afraid to show that I am smart, so I think they really like it.

P6   I get my homework done on time, and they know I am going to do it, so it helps that relationship (with teachers).

Having a good relationship with teachers was not something that the participants described as being obvious, but a good relationship would develop if they did their work, helped with other students, etc. The way the participants *define gifted*, as *working hard* and *being driven* contributes to the way teachers see them and probably to their relationships with their teachers. There is also a relationship to *being smarter* that was explored more fully under that property. There was a sense that working hard and having school be a priority was connected to the context of *sense of self*. Part of the way they defined gifted, such as *working hard,* stemmed from the way they see their abilities and their giftedness.

P7   I worked hard. I knew I could accomplish things if I set my mind to it.

Being smarter

Being smarter was the final property of *being gifted*. This property emerged in the first round but was unclear after the second round; therefore, during this third round, the second question was related to *being smarter*. The participants spoke a great deal about *being smarter,* and two new characteristics emerged. The first was *ease of schoolwork* and the second was *teacher relationships*.

Ease of school work

Because of being smarter, there is an ease with which the participants do their schoolwork. There is also a specific role that they fill as the one who gets it done or who can help others. There was a connection here as to whether or not the participants opted to hide their giftedness in school.

P1   I did not really hide my giftedness. It just did not take me as long to do my work, and I would play cards in class after my work. There were people in my class that I could do that with also. They were guys, but it did not really faze me.

P2   Well, when I was little, I had everyone coming to me for help and stuff and so I had to learn to hide it, so others wouldn't know. Now I have to learn to not hide it, and I have to be smarter now, because there is a lot more homework now and stuff.

P6   Like with my mom, I think it helps, because she doesn't have to help me with my homework every night and stuff.

P5   I get the same amount of homework unless I ask for more. I do that once in a while. We were learning about variables, and I have already done that, so I asked for a harder question.

P2   It is not very hard. The people that I know there already know that I am smart, so it is okay, and I don't know very many people there so they have, like it is not that hard. Unless I am making new friends, and they have to learn to live with it.

Teacher relationships

Participants also reported a sense that, because they are smarter, their

relationships with teachers are a little different.

P2   Yeah, they are sure that I am going to get it done, so they don't have to worry about me. They also know I can help with the other kids if I finish early and stuff like that.

P4   Like now I wonder if they don't have to bring stuff down to a little kid level. Like I think we are easier to talk to, like more on an adult level.

P4   …like it probably helped (our relationship) and stuff. Like I work with little kids and I know how hard it is to bring things down to their level. Like I have a big vocab but they don't yet. So, it was probably easier, because they (teachers) did not have to being things down as much… I think they noticed it, but I don't think the kids did.

P7   …like especially if there was a part of the test where I would not do as well. They would maybe take a second look at that, maybe think more on that than other students who would not do as well. I think maybe

> that might be because I am gifted and talented, or it might be because I am this hard worker and then if I don't perform…

Being smarter emerged as having a relationship to *working harder* and *being driven*, but here the content was more about their personality, potential, and the way that others see them, rather than specific assignments. This property emerged as important to the relationships that the participants build both with teachers and with peers. Those relationships are also related to connecting and fitting in. Overall, *being smarter* grew to a property that is about relationships, the way they see themselves, and the way they are seen by others.

All of the properties and dimensions of this category are interrelated. The way in which the participants *function as a gifted girl* has a great deal to do with how they *define giftedness*, and the way *being smarter* affects relationships. What also became apparent was that all of these properties interact with the greater context of *sense of self* and *changing*.

Connecting

After the third round of interviews, *connecting* continued to be supported as a category. *Connecting* is the way the participants make and keep friends and relationships with family, which are both pivotal components to their experience in sixth and seventh grade. The properties in this category remained the same in this round of interviews, but there was a change in the dimensions. This change came after further analysis of the data, and provided a thick description of the participants' experiences.

This large category held three properties after the second round of interviews, *changing relationships, fitting in* with one dimension that varies between *fitting in with gifted peers* and *fitting in with non-gifted peers,* and *feeling connected.* The property of *feeling connected* has a new dimension *self-in-connection* that varies from *feeling normal* and *feeling different.* These three categories stand as the best descriptors of the experience of sixth and seventh grade for these gifted participants. See figure 6-2 for an illustration of this category.

Changing relationships

The property of *changing relationships* was not discussed again, but is still considered an important part of this category by the researcher. The relationships that are emerging at this time have more depth and serve a distinct purpose, as was discussed in the second round. This property fits with the overall context of change, in terms of their developmental changes and their changes in school. It is natural that their relationships would change as a result of moving schools or grades and of their increasing awareness of themselves as they get older.

Fitting in

The participants discussed *fitting in*, and a new level of richness was discovered. *Fitting in* has one dimension with variation between, *fitting in with gifted peers* to *fitting in with non-gifted peers*. The participants expressed a distinct variance in how they fit in between the two groups. There was some discussion about *fitting in with gifted peers*, especially related to not having to hide or minimize their giftedness with them. Both the data collected from round two and the review of the literature revealed that there is a need to minimize giftedness in order to fit in.

Fitting in with gifted peers

These participants do not hide their giftedness when ***fitting in with gifted***

peers.

P1   I was in a class, my math class, where we were very much ahead. I was in a class with several other people who were gifted also; I was still ahead, but not ahead that much with them. In the normal spectrum of what would be a normal class, we just moved up.

P1   I don't know. I think it is odd that I have this small group of people and we were just friends. It did not really affect that, because we were all like that.

P2   It is not really hard, because I am going to a school that does not have any levels and so it is not as, like I don't have to hide it anymore, because I am in the highest math and reading class. It is easier, because there are people who are smarter than me in that class. The hard thing is that I have to learn not to hide it instead.

P6   A bunch of my friends are also gifted and um they like ask me about math homework, and I help them. Like I don't really hide it that much.

Fitting in with non-gifted peers

Fitting in with non-gifted peers is another variation of fitting in. Fitting in with

non-gifted peers was discussed at great length and was expressed by the participants as

both difficult and important to their overall experiences. The participants reported

having different behaviors when ***fitting in with non-gifted peers***. Wanting to fit in

entailed several different behaviors. The first was related to fitting in generally, having

friends and choices about how to interact with those friends.

P2   I know I have a lot of friends that I can't spend a lot of time with. Like it is really hard when you are talking to like five people at once, it is kind of annoying. I am like, what people would call in the popular group and it is kind of hard because people are always talking to you.

P4   My friends were giving me a hard time. Like I use the biggest words. They give me a bad time, but that is part of what they are for.

P4 …but, most of the time I have really good common sense. I go with what I think is best, what could happen, bad, good. I don't let peer pressure get to me at all. My friends know that if I say no that my decision is not going to change…

P5 It is easier to get through school with friends. If you have the same classes, they can help you with homework or whatever you might need.

The second area was related to not sharing knowledge in class, which was done in order to keep from standing out to preserve relationships.

P1 I think if I had felt like I was answering too much, I would have stopped myself from answering a lot. Like I do that now sometimes. Like I took a regular math class my sophomore year, than an advanced and now a regular class again. In my regular math classes, I don't speak up as much. I might answer under my breath. My friend hears me, sometimes the teacher does, I kind of do that now. I think I do that so I am not seen as, I don't want to portray myself as "I am better than you." I don't want to isolate myself, and I know that that can happen.

R So you did the same things back then?

P1 Yes

P4 Yeah, like I know I know it (the answers), but I want to give other people a chance to figure it out.

P1 …with teachers, I don't remember having any special relationships with them because I was gifted. I think I may have shied away from that because I was gifted. I also may have just not liked my teachers. I still don't get into, like I may talk to a teacher, but I don't have a really strong relationship with any teacher's. I think I might shy away from being seen as the teachers pet or whatever, but it is just not something I have ever done.

P2 In like science and stuff, I am partnered with someone who is a little slow. Like she is smart but does not have good handwriting, and she blurts out all the obvious answers. Like with her, I have to hide it a lot, so I don't be mean to her and she won't think I am mean. She gets upset if I know the answers.

P2 It is kind of hard, because I have to learn to hide it in one class and then remember not to hide it in another class and so I don't hurt someone's

feelings. It is kind of hard to turn it off and then turn it on during the day. It is more hard than easy.

They also described a behavior of not sharing their giftedness; this again was to preserve relationships and not make their friends "feel bad" and to ensure that they fit in.

P1	I have other things. Like I sew and do photography outside of school, and I do excel in those areas, but it is with a different group of people, and those people don't also see me getting high scores and stuff in school.
P3	I just keep it to myself I guess. I don't want to rub it into their face.
P3	I think it is a good thing, because you don't want to lose your friendship and make them feel bad so they don't want to be your friend anymore.
P3	It doesn't really affect them. Like you can act as dumb as you want to so it doesn't affect them
P5	(If they know I am gifted) I would get more homework, harder homework and other stuff…getting like harder stuff to do and my friends might feel bad because they are not in the same program as me.

While it is clear from the data that there is a level of minimizing or hiding giftedness, the participants do not directly express that they were minimizing or hiding. It is to them a way to fit in, which is critical to their experiences in sixth and seventh grade. They did not express feeling like they had to give up a part of themselves, a phrase often used in the literature. It is for them a way to stay **connected** to others, have friends, **function as a gifted girl**, just as **working harder** is.

<u>Feeling connected</u>

Finally, the property of **feeling connected** was supported with a new dimension, **self in connection**. This dimension more adequately expresses their

experience of how they see themselves related to others. This dimension varies

between *feeling normal* and *feeling different*.

Feeling normal

Feeling normal allows for the participants to feel connected and a part of the

larger social group at school. It relates to how they express their giftedness and how

they feel about their friends. **Feeling normal** also relates to **fitting in** and was a second

area where giftedness was minimized, although as one participant reported, she did not

feel she was hiding it.

> P6   A lot of my school is gifted so it is not really a thing to hide it… like I
> have to say I don't really hide it at all.

One other participant reported not hiding her giftedness but also stated that she

does not share it with anyone.

> P5   I don't think I have ever had to hide it because nobody ever asked or
> anything like I don't know. Nobody really knew.

From her perspective, not sharing her giftedness is not hiding. Two other

participants reported not answering in class as a way to show that they were normal,

just like everyone else.

> P1   It was more like the teacher said something and asked a question we
> should know. This was something that the other people should know,
> too. So those were the kinds of things that other people could do, too.
> So, even if I did know the answers, it did not feel like I was answering
> more

> P7   I think it can come from maybe feeling like an outsider because of that.
> Like you feel like you are getting treated a little different, so you think
> maybe that is not a good thing. Or I think they are only seeing me as
> gifted, and I want them to see me as something else, more than that. Or
> they are ignoring me, because they think I am totally different because
> of that. So, I think you maybe try to cover it up a little bit, or to show

something else. Like trying to show like "I am really not that gifted, I am just like you guys." Like, I think that is probably where that comes from. Like I want to fit and be seen as more than just gifted, or have people look beyond the fact that I am gifted.

Feeling different

Feeling different is a variation of the dimension ***self-in-connection***. In previous interviews the participants expressed feeling normal and that their giftedness could make them stand out and feel different. ***Feeling different*** affects how the participants see themselves in connection with others, therefore affecting how connected they feel. This variation of the dimension ***self-in-connection*** arose during the first two rounds of interviews, and, while not directly discussed in this round, the participants reported hiding of giftedness provides them a way to keep from ***feeling different*** in order to feel connected. This variation is closely related to the property of ***fitting in*** as it relates to their need for friendship and not standing out. There is a sense that, in order to ***fit in,*** they must appear normal, just like everyone else. ***Fitting in*** is done through either not sharing their giftedness or hiding it and the way they interact in and outside class. This variation also has a relationship to ***functioning as a gifted girl***. ***Being active*** in sports, as was evident from the participants and the literature, assists gifted girls in not standing out and having other areas where they can connect with peers in a non-academic setting, or an academic setting where everyone is gifted. Having non-academic activities or gifted programming available provides a setting where they ***feel normal*** and ***connected*** and in which they can function positively. The data to support these findings emerged from the second round of interviews and in this third round was carried over but not discussed.

Relationships between properties

Several relationships between the categories and properties emerged after the second round of interviews and were discussed in the previous chapter. From this third round of interviews, some of those relationships were strengthened, and new relationships emerged. The relationships that emerged after the second round of interviews between *defining gifted* and *functioning as a gifted girl* and *fitting in* and *feeling connected* both continue to be supported. Several new relationships among the properties emerged after the third round of interviews. These relationships are discussed here and are illustrated on figure 6-3.

Functioning as a gifted girl-connecting

A relationship exists between functioning as a gifted girl and connecting. One of the characteristics of functioning as a gifted girl is being active. The participants expressed that being involved in sports or other academic programs allows them to connect with peers in ways that improve their experience of sixth and seventh grade. As one participant stated while discussing her giftedness

> P7 …it affects who you meet. Like what programs you are in. You meet people in those programs who are talented and gifted, so as you embrace parts of who you are, like being gifted you start to meet people who have those same interests. Like sports or classes you take. So, you start. A lot of your friends, not all of them, were considered gifted, but so maybe you just have more relationships, and you are placed with those kinds of people in summer camp or classes.

This quote illustrates both how this participant *functions as a gifted girl* and how that functioning *connects* her to others. This quote also illustrates a link between the way the participants *function as a gifted girl* and the larger context of *sense of self*.

Defining gifted-being smarter

The way the participants **define gifted**, as **working hard** and **being driven,** also connects to their view of **being smarter**. They may work harder and ask for more work, because their schoolwork may seem too easy because of their intelligence.

> P5   I get the same amount of homework unless I ask for more. I do that once in a while. We were learning about variables, and I have already done that so I asked for a harder question.

> P1   … them giving me extra work was really normal for me. Like I could always ask for an extra assignment...

Being smart and the way the participants **define gifted** also connected to the context of **sense of self**, as both stem from the participants' view of themselves and their giftedness.

> P7   I worked hard. I knew I could accomplish things if I set my mind to it.

Fitting in-functioning as a gifted girl

The participants discussed **fitting in** a great deal through out the interviews. There was a sense that the way they **function as a gifted girl**, such as **having balance** in their lives and **being active,** help them in **fitting in**. **Fitting in** is done either through not sharing their giftedness or hiding it, and the way they interact in and outside class.

> P1   I have other things. Like I sew and do photography outside of school, and I do excel in those areas, but it is with a different group of people, and those people don't also see me getting high scores and stuff in school.

> P3   I just keep it to myself I guess. I don't want to rub it into their face.

> P3   I think it is a good thing, because you don't want to lose your friendship and make them feel bad so they don't want to be your friend anymore.

P7   I think it can come from maybe feeling like an outsider because of that. Like you feel like you are getting treated a little different so you think maybe that is not a good thing. Or I think they are only seeing me as gifted, and I want them to see me as something else, more than that. Or they are ignoring me because they think I am totally different because of that. So, I think you maybe try to cover it up a little bit, or to show something else. Like trying to show like "I am really not that gifted, I am just like you guys." Like, I think that is probably where that comes from. Like I want to fit and be seen as more than just gifted or have people look beyond the fact that I am gifted.

There are also relationships between the categories and properties identified and the larger contexts ***sense of self*** and ***changing***. These relationships are discussed in the context section.

<div align="center">

Context

</div>

Process coding was used during this third round of interviews as a way to add depth to the findings. Process coding examines any actions or interactions that can be traced back to structural conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The action of a process can be carried out with little thought but cannot be separated out from the other actions of the individual. I think of this like a structure of a house. One cannot have the house without the foundation. It is pivotal to the construction of the house, but it is often unacknowledged and out of our awareness. Strauss and Corbin described this structure as creating the context for the rest of the action. Two different levels of structure emerged from the interview process. The first is at the micro level and relates to the participants ***sense of self.***

Sense of self

From the second round, the importance of the participants having a ***sense of self*** and the way that sense of self emerged as a pervasive component to their

experience of sixth and seventh grade was strengthened during this third round of interviews. The participants' ***sense of self*** had several different forms. One way they discussed having a sense of themselves revolved around things that were important to them, primarily social activities.

P1   I did know my friends were important to me. Sports were important to me. I did know that I wanted to always do extra curricular stuff. I did know that I liked to do stuff with my family. I did also know that those things were important, but I did not know how important.

P1   I did know what my values were, and my morals that made me a little bit different from other people, but it was not something I would have talked about… I think it was there, but not really shared.

P1   I know that I am a people person. I have to have people around, I don't like to do lots of stuff by myself, although I can get fed up with people and need that alone time. People are defiantly a big part of how I relate to the world. I have my core group of friends, but I am defiantly a social butterfly…what is important to me has developed, as I have gotten older, but not as much in Jr. High. Although, I think it was similar in Jr. High, I just recognize it more now is that like I have never been one to go out and party. I don't date a lot. I do value my friends. My family time has diminished since I have been here, but it is important to me. I know I have my morals and my friends have the same morals. It is something I look for in other people.

P2   I think I know that my friends who I have known for a while would stand up for me and support me. I don't see my best friends very often unless they come over to my house or something, so that I know they would stand up for me. Like if someone was mean, they would do something to them, I hope nothing bad, and that they will stand up for me. I know my family will also support me.

P2   My family supporting me is important. I got some fish. They are important. I think my friends and school is pretty important. Like I know a lot of kids would not say that, but school is important and just the people in my life and what they give me.

P6   I like soccer, and sports… I am a funny person; I like to make people laugh.

P6   I spend a lot of time with my family, and I like to spend a lot of time with my friends.

P6   Um, my family is important, and they influence me a lot. School is important to me so I can go to college and get a good job, not just work at McDonalds or something. I don't know. I have never really thought about it.

P5   Friends, family, and books are important to me.

P5   I am good at math… I am tall, kind of; I am not good at science. (I like) books, tigers, yellow.

P7   I knew I was a very passionate person. I loved being around people. I loved people; I wanted to make some sort of help to people, like encouraging them, making peoples lives better. I loved being with family and friends. I was passionate about soccer, wanting to be a national soccer player. I had big dreams. I knew I liked science. I knew I was very loved by people and I was very supported in any choice I would make.

P7   Soccer, friends were important. I had two really great friends, and then there was an argument and they did not mesh again. I remember that being important, like trying to figure out how we could all be close again. Family was really important to me. Doing well in school was really important.

P3   Books, my friends, my family…doing the best I can is important to me.

P4   I know what I want to do. I want to become a dental hygienist and have a family. I know I want to have a job and teach my family and that I know anything I want to do I can do, or I can try my best. I know that I have a lot of people who care about me and who will be there for me through any decision that I make, even bad ones, they will be there for me.

P4   Well, family is the most important thing in my life. Sisters and brothers and moms and dads teach you life lessons… Family is very important. Friends are very important part of life.

The participants also talked about the way in which they understood themselves.

P2   I know that I am smart and stuff. I know that I am hyper sometimes. Now I am really tired. Yeah, I know I am smart and should not beat myself up for getting a bad grade and stuff. I sometimes tease people, like a little, like getting to know each other. I know that there are some people who cannot handle it and then you might get in trouble.

P2   I think that is it. Like I am really trying to figure myself out. Like I know I can by hyper and annoying that is probably the rest.

P3   I like history… I like reading. I like historical fiction. I don't like textbooks… I am a supportive friend. I like to make people happy. Even if I don't like someone and they are sad, I will try to cheer them up. I don't like to see people sad… I guess I have a good family; I have supportive friends that care about me.

And finally, there was some discussion of their sense of self that had a level of

depth that was not expected by the participants or me.

P1   No I don't think so, it was like tucked in there, but was not something I explored or talked about it a lot. It is a big part of my personality and what makes me me.

P2   Well, it is kind of hard to accept the like quirks and stuff that you have. Like my family is really critical and I used to brag a lot. Like it is good and bad. If you accept it, than you have to work on it. Like if you are really mean, then you wont have any friends and stuff.

P2   So, it is kind of scary, but it is good.

P3   (giftedness)…it is just one part of me

P3   I don't know….it is who I am. I really don't categorize it or anything. It is just who I am.

P3   It does feel good to have a sense of that… I have never thought of that. It feels good.

P4   Well, it is kind of weird. Like I have known it, but it is weird setting it all out and thinking that some day it will all happen.

P6   I guess it is good. It is a good list… I never thought about that stuff.

P5   It is fun. You would be lost if you did not know yourself

P7   Once you learn that than you can really embrace your giftedness and who you are and it is like "if you want to like me fine, if not fine."

P7   That helps you embrace those parts of yourself and be more comfortable and confident and helps you overcome the hiding stuff.

> When you get more around people who embrace those parts of you, you feel more comfortable and can express who you are.

P7   I think about that, not having people who care about you, not having a sense of it. Like there are parts of life that you don't feel great, but you get support from your parents and you feel like you can do stuff well. No matter what I will be okay. It felt good and helped me through the times that did not feel as good. It makes you stronger.

One interesting component that this depth explored was that, for the most part, a *sense of self* is outside the participants' everyday awareness, as it probably is with most people. When asked about this part of themselves, most of the participants struggled, but all of them were able to describe who they are at their core. This micro level structure has a deep impact on the way the participants view themselves and their experiences. This *sense of self* encompasses all of the other categories, properties, and dimensions, as without it those other components would not be the same. Having a *sense of self*, a strong identity, and a sense of a place in the world is critical for anyone and, for these participants is an inseparable component of being gifted and connecting and a critical piece of their experience of sixth and seventh grade.

Changing

At the macro level is this structure of change. The participants were *changing* schools, changing developmentally, and getting older. These changes occur globally regardless of the participants' interest in changing. As with *sense of self*, the act of changing is attached to the other categories, properties, and dimensions of the experience of sixth and seventh grade for these participants. This change is out of their control but has an impact on their experience that, like *sense of self*, cannot be separated from their being gifted and connecting. In this third round, only a few of the participants discussed changing, and it was related to both school changes and

developmental changes of that age. This was the first time that the data has reflected

that this change to sixth and seventh grade can be difficult.

> P1   So, I do see my life as I have a plan for it, I know where I am going. I know I am going to go to college. I know I am going to go to grad school and get some type of job in politics or something like that. I have known that since like sixth grade. When I was in fourth grade I would argue with my dad a lot, and he would be like. "you know you could be a lawyer and argue for a living." I just have always had a plan for the way my life will go. I know what will be going on in 5 years or 10 years. I have always had it planned out.

> P2   I am still getting adjusted to it. Like I am getting adjusted, but it is hard.

> P2   It feels like I can't believe, how did I do that. It is like I got a D and did all my work, so how did I get a D. I am not beating myself up for it, but I do get upset sometimes. Like if I got an F, I would be really upset, but if I pass, then I will be okay because I don't have to take it over.

> P7   I don't know if it was shyness of being gifted or if it is just the stage in middle school. Like you are not really sure who you are. So, it may not be like embracing giftedness. It just may be that you don't know. There are so many things that you are not sure of and so I think that was a time where I felt sort of, like I could tell I felt a little lost. Like you don't know your interest or what you want to do to use your talents and giftedness to help people.

The participants described both emotional changes and the change in difficulty

of sixth and seventh grade. Getting lower grades after working hard was a new

experience for one of the participants. This adjustment period most likely had

an impact on the participants' view of giftedness and the way they see

themselves. One of the high school participants summed up this experience

with change eloquently when she said

> P7   A lot of stuff changes in that time, and you really learn more who you are.

<div align="center">Triangulation</div>

The data in this final round were triangulated in several ways. The first was the use of the literature review to support the findings. Next a focus group was done to provide an opportunity for member checking. During the focus group, the findings of the research were discussed with the participants to ensure that their experiences were understood correctly. The final area of triangulation was an ongoing discussion of the findings with two gifted adult women to see if the experiences of these participants fit with their experiences.

Review of the literature

The review of the literature for round one and round two of the interview process focused on aspects of the experience of giftedness, including information about the role of friendships (Azmitia, Ittel, & Radmacher, 2005), the challenges and social pressure on gifted girls at this age (Reis, 2002; Rimm, 2002), the role of perfectionism and high level of expectations that gifted girls face (Coleman & Cross, 2004; Milsom, 2004; Schuler, 2002) and the role of athletics and extra curricular activities (Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee, 2004). These research participants described all of these areas as important aspects of being gifted and fitting in. What had not been reviewed in the literature thus far was the importance of identity development, having a sense of self and a sense of connection with others.

This review of the literature focused on identity development and supporting the context, *sense of self* and the category *connecting*, as from this round of interviews; these contexts appeared to be critical to participants' experiences. During early adolescence, in particular middle school, participants experience more changes

than at any other time in their lives. Most of these changes are accompanied by an urgency to form an identity (Broughton & Fairbanks, 2003). The development of an identity is a long, ongoing process that is influenced by many factors. Broughton and Fairbanks focused their research on the school as one area that has a large impact on the development of identity. The researchers discussed the difficulty that has been found in other research for girls of this age to develop a positive identity. One of the factors that Broughton and Fairbanks pointed to is the way that the classroom environment is structured. They, like other researchers, discussed the oppressive environment of a classroom, where boys' answers are more valued and where textbooks and other learning materials focus on male achievements and limit female achievements.

In Broughton and Fairbanks (2003) qualitative study of seventh grade girls, they found that the girls' views of themselves and others changed over time and that they were struggling to negotiate a sense of self. Their research participants expressed that they liked seventh grade, because they knew the school and had friends, but the expectations were higher and the work harder. Broughton and Fairbanks work, supported the findings of this research that the participants experienced higher expectations and a harder work load in seventh grade. Broughton and Fairbanks also spoke to the importance of friendship and connection when developing an identity.

A large part of forming an identity is having a *sense of self*. The participants in this study described having a sense of self even when they may not think about it much. It is an understanding of what they like, things that are important to them, and what they know about themselves. Brown and Gilligan (1992) described the

development of a sense of self at this age as a growing awareness of social

construction, the roles of adult women, and the awareness of the importance of

relationships and the dance that is often required to maintain relationships. They

stated:

> We become aware of the wall girls face and their responses to the
> experience of relational impasse by listening to their voices and
> hearing their disillusionment and confusion, their sadness and their
> anger, but also their courage and their resistance to the pressures
> they feel from within and without not to feel what they fell or
> know what they know. One by one, these girls narrate their lives-
> what they see and hear, what they feel and think, and then over
> time their experience of anxiety and conflict when they find
> themselves in situations where it seems necessary either to
> disconnect from others or dissociate from themselves. (p, 161)

This quote illustrates the view in the literature that gifted girls often have to

chosen between giftedness and fitting in. The participants in this study expressed that

they often make a choice between being gifted, knowing the answers and doing well in

school, and keeping friendships, not wanting to hurt peoples' feelings and not wanting

to stand out. The participants in this study did not express anxiety or fear in making

these choices. Some said it can be hard, but for the most part it is simply part of what

they know they must do in order to fit in. The participants in this study know what

they know and feel and think what they think, but the need to connect with others

overrides their desire to express what they know, feel, and think. They are making a

choice to disconnect from themselves in order to connect with others.

Stern (1991) described this choice to disconnect from the self as disavowing

the self. "Some girls, who in preadolescence demonstrate a solid sense of self, begin in

adolescence to renounce and devalue their perceptions, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings

(p. 105). This disavowing of the self, according to Stern, is done in an attempt to avoid having to make a choice between the self and others. By denying ideas that may cause conflict, a girl protects herself from criticism or anything else that could harm the relationship. For the participants in this study, this theme was described at all three interviews. Having a sense that they cannot share grades, or knowledge, or answer questions in class because they do not want a friend to feel bad or have their feelings hurt is exactly what Stern was describing. Marshall and Arvay (1999) found that girls do not speak up as much as boys, and that the reason for that self silencing was a fear of losing relationships, being seen as not nice, fear of being in a conflict, and wanting to be loyal to friends. This research also fits with the participants' views of speaking up in class, being afraid to stand out, and being a "know it all."

Researchers such as Kerr, (1994), Rimm, (2002), Coleman and Cross, (1998) all described the importance of fitting in and the struggle that gifted adolescents often feel. Rimm's (2002) study described five coping mechanisms that gifted girls employ to deal with the "social stigma of giftedness" (p. 15). These coping mechanisms include hiding giftedness, working to gain peer acceptance, and increasing social interaction, among others. The participants in this study utilize these methods but do not express any struggle or sense of loss as a result of using these coping mechanisms. For these participants, fitting in is critical but not as difficult as the literature assumes it is.

The research participants did not describe having to hide their giftedness with other gifted students. In fact, it is with other gifted students that they can really be who they are, and know what they know. One participant described being herself as

"embracing her giftedness." This participant and a few others expressed that being around other gifted students is what ultimately has led them to have a strong *sense of self*. It is in the experiences where they can be who they are that they are able to learn who that is.

All of the participants spoke about their friend and family relationships as being critical to their experience of sixth and seventh grade. They also spoke about the choices that they make in order to sustain those relationships. Gilligan (2004) stated, "I have come to the riddle of femininity: The choice between having a voice and having relationships" (p. 135). The participants in this study are choosing to have relationships. However, none of them expressed feeling like they are really giving something up. There is a trade off that these girls seem to understand and value. It seems that there is something very powerful in a girl making a choice to connect with others and take care of her need to have friends and a position in a school system that can be very hard on kids.

This choice, in and of itself, requires a great deal of strength and a strong sense of self. Having that connection to others build self-esteem and self-concepts. "The girl's sense of self-esteem is based in feeling that she is a part of relationships and is taking care of those relationships" (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991, p. 16). Jordan et al. described the connection between a sense of self and relationships with others as a more integrated process. They found that girls change and are changed by being in relationships, that individuals can influence each others thoughts, feelings, and actions through connecting, not separating. This connecting leads to a "more complex sense of self in more complex relationships to other selves" (p. 17). Jordan et

al.'s way of looking at the connection between sense of self and relationships fits more closely with the experiences that these research participants were expressing. They are learning about themselves by being in relationships with others. While there is certainly some level of compromise that comes with all relationships, they are expressing this compromise as a less restricting experience than some would expect. It is through having a strong identity, sense of self, and connections with others that the experience of sixth and seventh grade, for these participants, was going quite well so far.

Member Checks

Member checking took the form of a focus group that was conducted with three of the participants. The other research participants were no longer available due to scheduling conflicts. During the member checking, the researcher reviewed the findings with the participants using a diagram of the findings as a reference point. Time was offered for the participants to voice their view of the findings. This review of the findings was done generally and category by category. The participants made several general comments about the findings.

R   So, in general what are your overall impressions of this (findings)?

P2   I think it really resembles it a lot, like what I said anyway.

P5   Yeah, it fits

P7   It really does fit with a lot of the connections that I expressed. I think this is really like what I meant.

R   Is there anything that you think does not belong in here?

All   No

P2   Not really, like I know I talked about all of this stuff, especially the fitting in part. Like with gifted or not gifted friends. Like that is really important.

P2   Not really, this is pretty much everything I talked about. If there is something I cannot remember it, so it must not be very important.

Being gifted

The participants provided general feedback about the category of ***being gifted***. There was a sense from all of the participants that all of the properties and dimensions of this category were correct and appropriately expressed their views.

P2   I think they really say what I said. Like having to turn giftedness on and off and stuff. Like it says what I said.

P5   It (gifted category) really seems to match.

One of the previous properties of this category ***being identified*** was discussed more specifically in order to ensure that the removal of the property was appropriate.

P2   Yeah, like when I was in first and second grade, I was a little depressed for my age and I think that was because I was smart and like no one knew that….the work was so easy and finally last year I got permission to go ahead in stuff and that got a lot better.

R   So for you being identified helped people acknowledge what you knew you could do and things got better.

P2   Yeah

P7   …I don't know, I think there were parts like, where in a math class in sixth grade the students would do their work and still had homework. I could get everything done in class with time to spare. It was too easy. So, my parents talked to my teacher and I was moved up and that made it a lot better. Like hey I am learning now. I remember like from sixth grade until like eighth grade I did not really learn anything. Like in eighth grade we would find out what the homework is and we would get it done without having the concepts introduced.

P2   Yeah, like once I find out what the homework is I am done like really fast.

P5   Yeah

As the participants discussed this property, what emerged was the idea that it

was not the identification of giftedness that had an influence but having resources to

go with that identification. In fact, for all of the participants, the process of being

identified was unclear and not very significant to their experiences.

R   What is occurring to me as you all are talking that it may not really be
          about being identified as gifted, but about having access to resources
          and classes that challenge you. Is it more about that then the process of
          being identified?

P2   Yeah, I think so. Like I was identified in second grade, but I was not
          allowed to go ahead in my work. My mom has to talk to my teachers
          and stuff.

P7   Yeah, and there are some people where the teachers are always having
          to like….like I know this stuff. Let's move on. I think you get that even
          in gifted classes, like some people get stuff and some people don't
          really get it. My teacher is like don't make your friends feel bad if they
          don't get it. Like I was identified early on. Like they took a group of us
          and put us in the library and like we did not know why and stuff.

P2   Yeah, like I was in the middle of second grade when they did that, and
          like we had walkie-talkies because it was so small so they were like
          _____ come to the office and I was like "okay, what am I doing?" I
          was nervous because I didn't think I had done anything wrong…

P7   Like why am I doing this?

R   So it is not the process?

P7   Yeah, like they never told us what was going on. Like in elementary
          there isn't anything different. Maybe you get divided for math and
          whatever. For regular stuff there was no TAG program until sixth
          grade.

P2   Yeah, like now they don't really have anything.

P7   Yeah, like just for math and social studies, so it is like why are you
          trying to identify us so hard when there like you still are not doing
          anything about it? Like they don't even really tell you what talented is,

so it is just like…."wait I am smart, why aren't you doing anything about it?"

P2   Yeah, like what is the point in telling me that? I thought at first it meant dumb, and I was upset at first, but once I understood I was like why don't you move me somewhere? They offered to let me skip a grade, but then I would have to make new friends, and I don't like to do that after I make really good friends so I was like no. I just wanted to go ahead in some subjects.

R   To P5…you are kind of nodding over here. Is this what your experience was like also?

P5   I didn't know I was gifted until like last year or the year before when _____ sent a thing about the summer program. Like that was when I found out.

P7   Yeah, like I got that thing also.

R   Do you think having more gifted classes would be important.

All   Yeah

P2   Yeah, 'cause like you don't really learn anything new until like the very end of the year.

After the member checking, it became clear that ***being identified*** is more about having access to resources and classes once the identification is made, rather than the process itself. It is no longer supported as a separate property, but is rather just a small piece of ***being gifted***. This discussion with the participants also lends support to the need for access to resources, one component of the implications of this research.

Connecting

The participants spoke again about the importance of fitting in and that balance between fitting in and being gifted. They talked about the balance that goes along with fitting in and being gifted.

R   Feeling the same as your classmates felt important, as did trying not to really stand out.

P2   Yeah, that is hard.

R   Sometimes you talked about knowing the answers in class, but not wanting to keep answering.

P2   Yeah, like you don't get called on as much in class, because you answer over and over.

P7   Yeah, like the teacher will want to call on someone else like "I know you know this, what about someone else?"

R   Yep, and so trying, what it felt like to me was trying not to stand out so much and not to hurt your friends was really important…It did seem like for those of you who have different levels of classes that in those classes where you are in the higher level that you could be yourself more and be smart and know the answers. When it was mixed with everybody, maybe you didn't.

P7   Yeah, I would definitely agree with that. When you are in your honors group you know that everyone is in here is smart and working hard. But then like when we had science then if you were doing extra effort or knowing the answers, people were like (makes a face to indicate people staring at her) okay.

P2   Yeah, like in my science class, it is just me that knows the answers, but like in my math class, everyone knows the answers.

The participants also talked about hiding their giftedness and what doing so is like for them. They spoke about it in terms of being sensitive to others, trying not to stand out, and as a way to fit in. They all agreed that, for them, it is not a negative experience.

R   There is this thing that the literature says that in order for you all to fit in you have to hide giftedness and you all talk about doing that. Maybe not answering in class and not bragging about grades to your friends.

P7   Yeah, like if you do really well and your friend did not, you are like "man that was hard, those teachers are crazy."

All   (laughing) yeah

R   So you all do this. For you all, this is a normal part of what you do and
        that you all do this to fit in and it does not feel like it is negative. Like
        the literature talks about this as a negative thing and it does not feel like
        that from you. So, that is the other area I would like to talk about.

P2   I don't think it is bad, like my mom taught me about understanding
        about
        how others think and stuff. Like you have to learn how to think and
        stuff.

P7   I think also I notice that now I don't do that much, unless, like I have a
        friend who gets really stressed, and so I will kind of not say anything. It
        is not so much like hiding it, but being sensitive to your friends.

P5   Yeah, if you don't, you will lose them.

P7   If you are not liking it, than maybe it is negative, but for me it is just to
        be sensitive.

P2   Like the ones who are really smart are at the bottom of the food chain
        and the ones who are really dumb are at the top. I am not sure why, so,
        I hide it so I don't end up at the bottom. I am sensitive to my friends,
        but I mostly hide it so I don't end up in the bottom.

R   It sounds like you all can see that that time can be really hard for girls
        who are like you all have used the words "nerdy, bookish, geeky" and
        so you all have noticed how to blend in.

P2   Yeah, like hide it or blend in, so you don't get picked on and stuff. Like
        I have to seem not too smart.

R   But it doesn't feel bad.

All   Nope

One participant talked about ***fitting in*** as it related to having a strong ***sense of***

self.

P7   I think it also has to do with coming into a comfort level of who you
        are, and I think that helps to deal with all that…I think that is the most
        important thing. Like you know if it is a good or right choice for you.

For the last component of the focus group and member checking, I asked each of the participants to talk about their experience as part of the study. They talked about enjoying the process but finding the task of looking at their lives difficult.

P2   Well, I think it is kind of cool to be interviewed…it is all good, like no negatives really.

P5   Well, I think the questions were a little hard, like having to look at this stuff differently. It was fun though.

P7   I thought it was really interesting to look back on this stuff. Like knowing what I know now and then looking back on that was really nice.

P2   It can be really funny to look back on stuff.

P7   Yeah, like it was educational. Like your questions really made me think about myself and stuff.

P2   Yeah, it is kind of different to really think about what you are doing.

P5   It was kind of hard to. Like the questions were not hard in general, but just hard to think of things that way, but good.

Discussions with adult women

Throughout the study, I spoke with two gifted women. The purpose of those discussions was to provide additional support for the findings. The two women with whom I spoke had both been identified as gifted in early elementary school. Both of the women had received some type of programming through their schools for their giftedness, and, for both women, that programming stopped once they transitioned to middle school. These women were identified through graduate programs at teaching colleges in the Northwest.

For the category of ***being gifted,*** the women supported all but one of the properties, dimensions, and connections that were made. They, like the research

participants, agreed that the process of **being identified** should not be a separate property and that what aided in their experience was having access to resources and programming, which made them feel gifted, not the identification. They agreed that how they **functioned as a gifted girl** had a direct connection with how well they fit in. They also believed that this property had the most impact on the other properties in this category. For example, **having balance** had a direct impact on how they handled the increased pressure and higher expectations, how hard they worked, and what it was like to **feel smarter**.

The women also spoke about how hard it was to **fit in** as a gifted girl and that fitting in was critical, possibly the most important aspect to their experience of sixth and seventh grade. They agreed with the research participants that there was a hiding of their giftedness in order to fit in. One of the women was able to fit in successfully and enjoyed her experience. The other had more difficulty, and thus had a more negative view of that time. For both of the women, there was a feeling that being smart and knowing the answers made them stand out in class, just as the participants reported. The women agreed that **fitting in with gifted peers** was much easier than **fitting in with non-gifted peers**. They reported that in their gifted classes or programs they felt freer to be themselves and they did not have to hide their intelligence. They both expressed hiding their intelligence from non-gifted peers both as a way to fit in and not upset their friends, but primarily as a way not to stand out. Standing out and feeling different are what led to one of the women having a negative experience in sixth and seventh grade. She reported having difficulty making friends, being picked on, and feeling like an outsider. On reflection, she realized that she did not hide her

giftedness, or stop answering questions in class, and attributed that to her feeling like she did not fit in. The choice to hide giftedness or not has been a choice that gifted girls have had to make for several generations.

The women also agreed with the finding that having a ***sense of self*** is an inseparable part of the experience of sixth and seventh grade for gifted girls. The way they saw themselves had a large impact on the way they viewed giftedness and how they connected with others. Both of the women expressed having a strong sense of self at that time, even if they would not have been able to express it. They both had a good connection with family and access to resources. The understanding that they had of who they were at the time is what both women said helped them move through that time.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

After three rounds of interviews, the categories, properties, dimensions, and relationships were identified. During the third round and the focus group, these categories, properties, dimensions, and relationships took on a level of richness and depth that naturally progressed into a grounded theory of the experience of sixth and seventh grade for these gifted girls. During the third round, each participant was interviewed for the last time, and five of the participants participated in member checking. The two categories ***being gifted*** and ***connecting*** were supported without change. The two contexts ***sense of self*** and ***changing*** were also supported without change but with a deeper understanding of their importance.

Being gifted

This category is defined as the way in which giftedness influences or affects their lives. ***Being gifted*** has an impact on the way they are seen at school, with friends, and with their families. It also impacts the choices that they make in order to ***connect*** with others. The property of ***functioning as a gifted girl*** emerged as one of the most critical in this category. This property relates to how they function on a day-to-day basis. Two characteristics of this property, ***being active*** and ***having balance,*** related not only to their school functioning but also to their ability to function with peers and with family. The participants described ***being active*** as not only participating in sports and other extra-curricular activities, but as a way to ***feel normal*** and ***connect*** with friends in a non-academic setting, which contributes to their overall functioning. ***Having balance*** is the concept of having more in their lives than school. Playing sports, being with friends, and playing music all contribute to the participants feeling that they are more than their giftedness. It also relates to how they fit in with others and how they cope with change.

Defining gifted is the way in which each individual participant sees and understands her giftedness. For all of the participants, ***defining gifted*** included ***being driven*** and ***working harder***. The dimension and characteristic of this property related primarily to schoolwork, but also to their relationships with teachers and friends. All of the participants described being driven to do well and work hard, which the teachers notice and it seems to have an impact on the way they are seen by their teachers. Being noticed by teachers connects to the increased pressure that the participants described as they moved from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade. This

pressure is primarily described as an internal pressure or a pressure to live up to expectations. These expectations also come with being smarter.

Being smarter emerged with two new characteristics, *ease of schoolwork* and *relationships with teachers*. The participants described getting schoolwork done quickly and easily, because they were smart. Their relationships with teachers were different, because the teachers knew they would get their work done. *Being smarter* also has an impact on the way they *fit in* with peers, both gifted and non-gifted, and how well they *connect* with others. This property developed into a property about relationships to teachers, to peers, and to parents.

Connecting

After the third round of interviews and the member checking, the category of *connecting* stood out as the most critical category when exploring the experience of sixth and seventh grade for these participants. The participants repeatedly expressed that having a sense of connection and belonging were the most important parts of sixth and seventh grade. Wanting to belong is the basis for their choice to hide their giftedness in some situations and to make choices about with whom they will connect. One property of this category is *change in relationships*. This property was not directly discussed again during the interviews, but it relates to the changes in the way sixth and seventh graders interact with their friends. The participants had described changes in activities, types of subjects talked about, and the way their relationships changed as they got older. The change in their relationships had an impact on the closeness of their relationships and their sense of connection to their friends. All of the participants described having a core group of friends with whom they are moving

through school. Even though those relationships are changing, they are still a central part of their experiences.

The change in the relationship also relates to how the participants fit in. ***Fitting in*** is the most important component of the research findings, and it is critical to the participants'. These participants discussed the ease with which they ***fit in with gifted peers***. They do not have to hide their giftedness, and they are able to be themselves. When they are trying to ***fit in with non-gifted peers,*** they hide or minimize their giftedness, according to the participants, in order to protect the feelings of their non-gifted friend and to preserve the relationship. For these participants, fitting in and preserving relationships are much more important than demonstrating their giftedness all of the time. They described this hiding as a choice and one that they are comfortable making. While much of the literature would pathologize this choice, for these participants, it brings them closer to their friends and helps them feel connected in an otherwise difficult school environment.

The purpose of fitting in is to ***feel connected***. ***Feeling connected*** has two dimensions, ***feeling normal*** and ***feeling different***. ***Being smart***, answering all of the questions in class, and the increased pressure all contribute to the participants' ***feeling different***. The hiding of giftedness and ***being active*** in sports or school activities helps the participants ***feel normal***. It is the balance between the two that allows them to feel connected, which relates to how well they fit in. How well they ***fit in, feel connected, function as a gifted girl, define gifted***, and handle ***being smarter*** all have a direct impact on their experience of sixth and seventh grade.

<u>Sense of self</u>

On the micro level, how these participants see themselves, their values, and their goals has an inseparable impact on the way they experience sixth and seventh grade. This context emerged from the second round of interviews but solidified during the third round. These participants have a strong sense of who they are, what they value, and what they want out of life, even in sixth grade. It is this understanding that is helping them be able to make difficult choices, like hide their giftedness to save a friendship. As the literature discusses, having an awareness of who they are contributes to their ability to connect with others, which in turn strengthens that connection. These participants are confident enough in who they are that they do not need to stand out and feel that protecting their friends' feelings is more important than sharing their grade on an exam. It takes strength of character and a strong awareness to be able to feel good about oneself internally and not need to have that reinforced from external sources. These participants, while not expressing this level of depth, are allowing their sense of who they are guide their choices both academically and socially.

<u>Changing</u>

At the macro level, these participants are going through many changes that cannot be separated from their experience of sixth and seventh grade. These changes include the change in grade, changing schools, getting older, and other developmental changes. The participants discussed how difficult the changes can be and the way those changes impact how they see giftedness and their connections with others. These changes also have an impact on their ***sense of self***. The participants expressed that the

way the see giftedness, their relationships with friends, and the importance of fitting in all changes as they get older and transition in sixth and seventh grade. These changes are out of their control but have a direct impact on how they see themselves, their friends, and their giftedness.
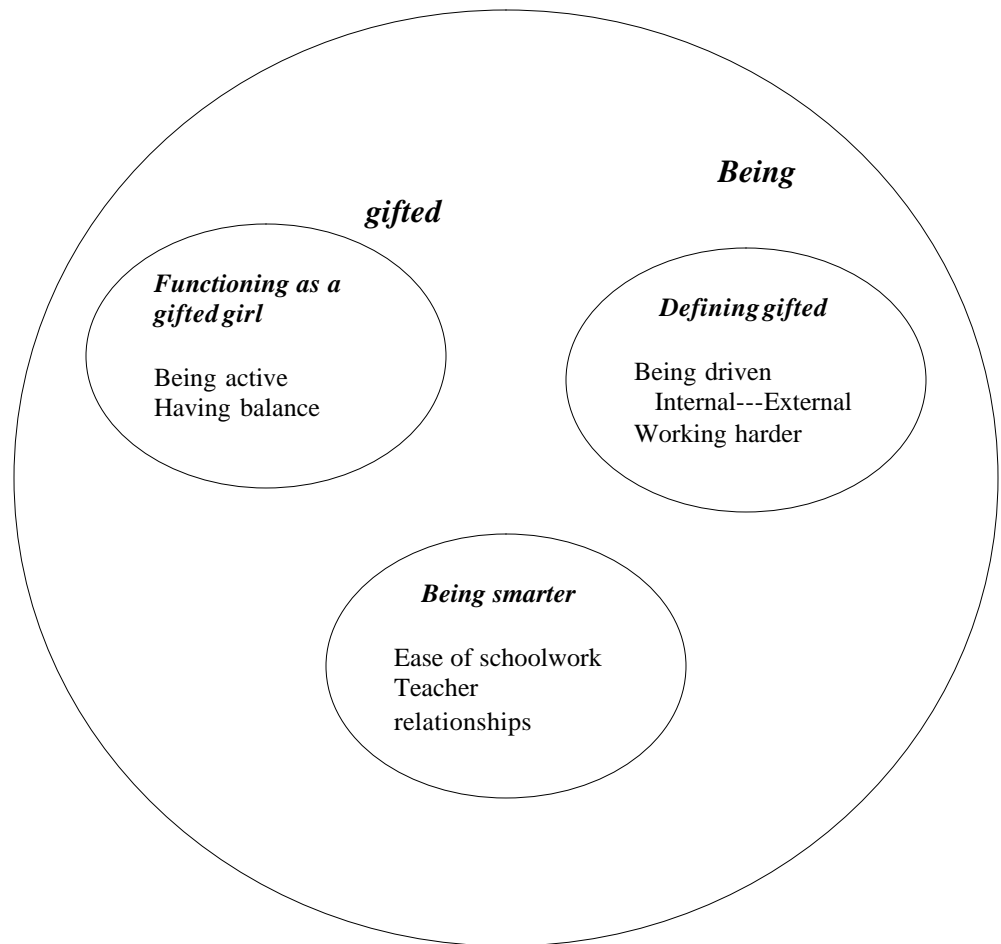
Figure 6.1: Illustration of the category ***being gifted***.

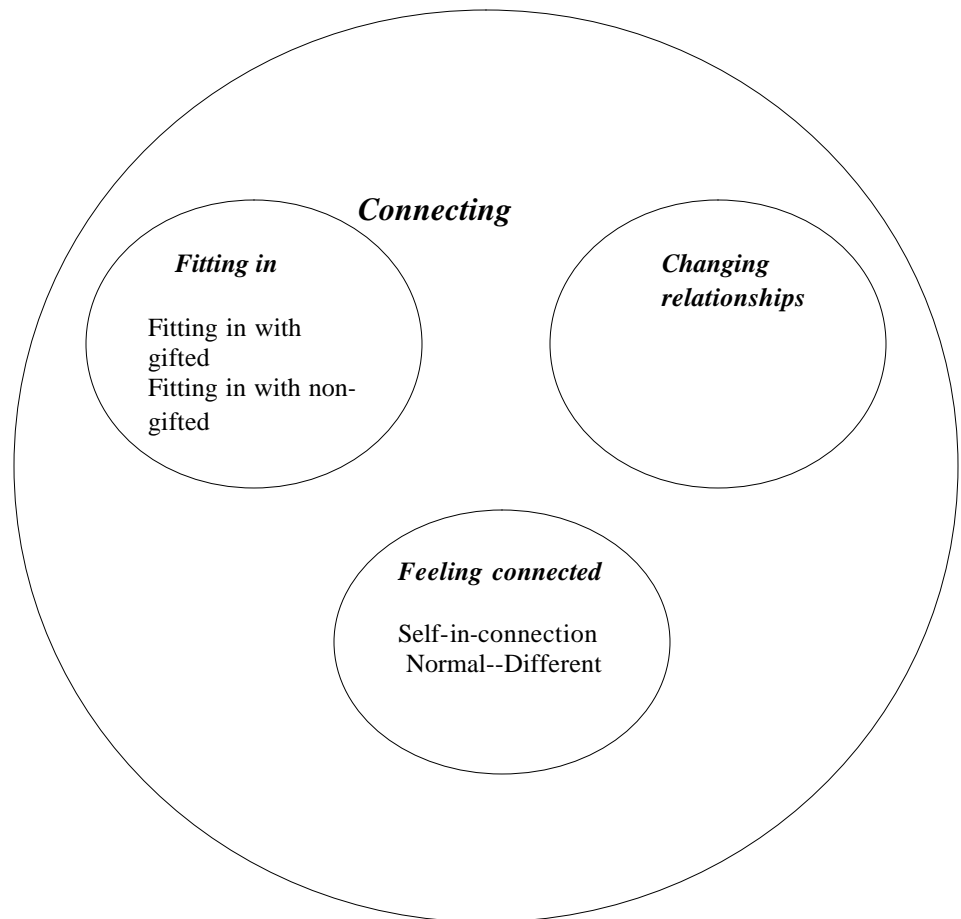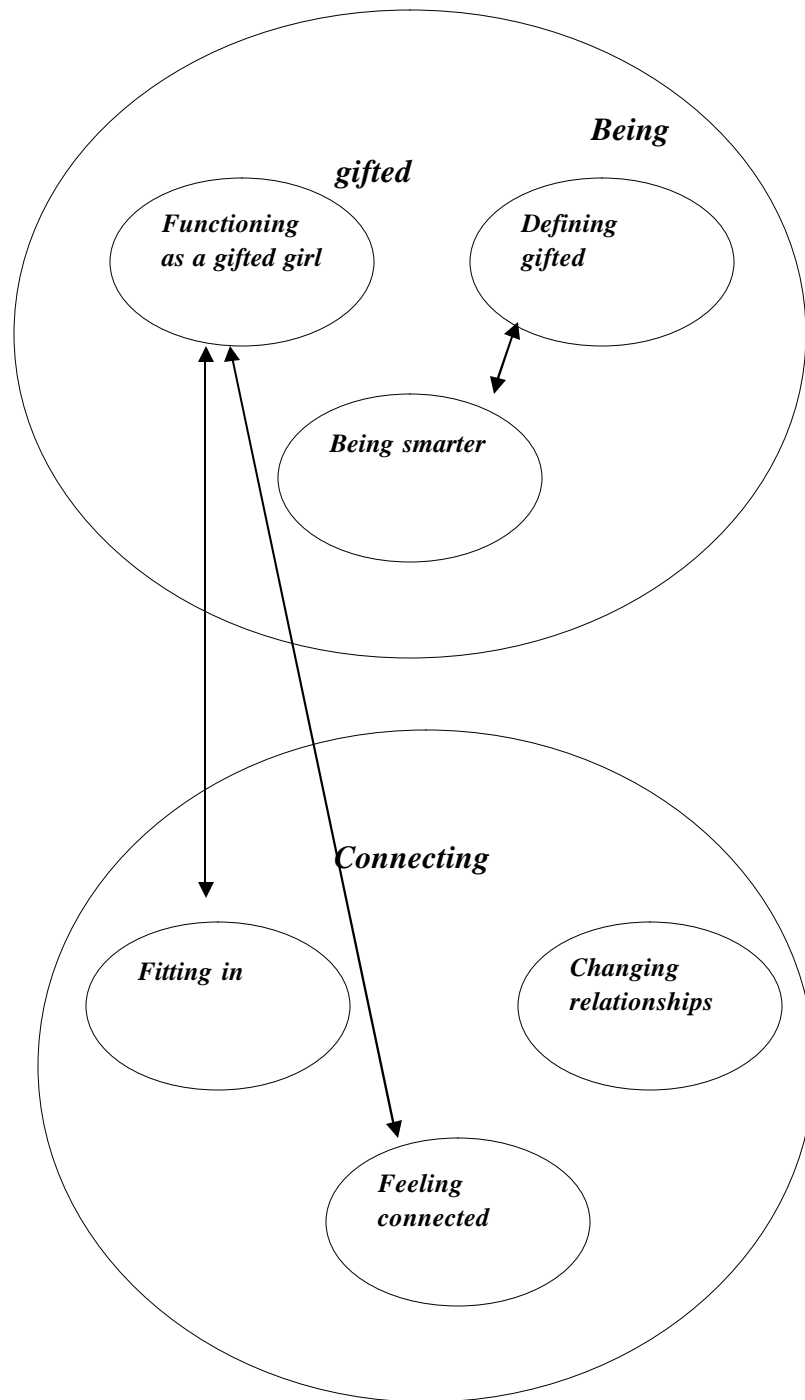Figure 6.2: Illustration of the category *connecting*

Figure 6.3: Illustration of relationships between categories and properties.

CHAPTER VII

Discussion

The focus of this research was to explore the experience of gifted girls transitioning to sixth and seventh grade. 7 participants were interviewed 3 times over a period of 4 months and then 3 of the participants participated in a focus group. The following is the culmination of their ideas into a grounded theory of the experience of gifted girls transitioning to sixth and seventh grade.

A grounded theory of the experience of gifted girls transitioning

from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade.

The experience of transitioning from elementary school into sixth and seventh grade was for these participants a struggle at times but not as difficult as some literature reported it would be. Many changes took place including moving to a new, often larger, school, receiving grades and having multiple teachers, having a locker, and learning a new academic system. Other changes, developmental in nature, also occurred. Participants reported that they experienced changes in the way they interacted with peers and fitting in became critical. For the gifted girls in this study, adjusting to these changes was sometimes difficult and sometimes easy. Participants focused on two major areas. The first was the way they experienced being gifted, and the second was that they connected with others. Underlying the experience was their sense of self and the process of change. The participants in this study had a way of understanding giftedness that included how they functioned academically and socially, the drive that they felt to work hard and achieve at high levels because of the way they

defined giftedness, and their experience of being smarter than other students in their classes. Connected to their functioning as gifted girls was their sense of self and desire to connect with others, both of which have an impact on their daily experiences.

Academically, the gifted girls in this study reported having an easy time in school. They were able to finish their schoolwork very quickly and were often able to help other students in the class. They reported often knowing most of the material being presented in class, working ahead, and even completing the work for classes very early in the school term. Being smarter than other students in their class resulted in the schoolwork being easy but also led to frustrations about not learning. The participants believed that, once identified as gifted, access to programming that allowed them to work at their level was important. Identification of giftedness was not the primary factor that contributes to participants' identity as gifted girls; the opportunity to develop their intelligence was much more significant. The participants who had gifted programs in their school were able to learn in these classes. The ones that did not might have gone the entire year without learning from the teacher. In spite of not learning much in school, these participants experienced their relationships with teachers as trouble-free and strong. The participants also experienced their teachers and parents as having high expectations, and they internalized these expectations, causing them to feel an increased pressure to do well.

In addition to being smarter than others, these gifted girls expressed their definition of giftedness. The participants expressed that defining gifted included a desire to work hard and a drive to do well. This drive came from external relationships, such as those with parents and teachers, and their own internal

awareness of what they are capable of. This desire to work hard and do well carried with it the risk of standing out academically, which was related to the way that they functioned socially. Standing out academically contributed to social isolation, being picked on, and a lack of connection. In order to connect, the gifted girls in this study reported hiding their giftedness in a classroom by perhaps not answering the teachers' questions or not sharing their high score on an exam when other students in the class did not do well. The choice to meet the expectations of teachers or to attempt to blend in and connect with friends was a difficult one for participants. All of the gifted girls in this study made the choice to blend in more and found that they had a much easier time fitting in than other gifted girls they observed who did not attempt to hide their giftedness.

Making the choice to blend in and still get their work done was related to their sense of self. A strong sense of self helped them navigate relationships with teachers. These girls were confident in their own identity and did not feel a need to stand out in a class, which also helped maintain friendships. They were able to get their work done on time and done well. They often tried to do more than was assigned and were willing to help others if needed. This commitment to schoolwork strengthened the relationships with their teachers. They stated that they were not as compelled to be the teacher's favorite or do extra work in the presence of others simply for the teacher's approval. They did not spend a lot of extra time around the teacher, which helped to preserve the relationship with the teacher and strengthen their relationships with peers. They were driven to do well and confident in their abilities, so they needed very little

attention from the teacher but were focused in class, did not get into trouble, and maintained their relationships.

Despite having to discover a way to meet teacher and family expectations without jeopardizing relationships, the gifted girls in this study put a lot of pressure on themselves academically and in other areas, such as sports or music or non-academic school activities. They felt driven to be successful and do everything to the best of their ability. This drive, it seems, could cause frustration or anxiety, yet this drive is simply a part of who they are, and the participants did not describe any difficulties with this drive. The participants stated that part of what keeps their drive from becoming overwhelming was having balance in their lives. These participants recognized that there is more to life than academics and added social activities to their daily routine. Even though the participants were driven to do well in these activities, the activities themselves provided a necessary balance in their lives that they reported helped them to fit in and cope with day-to-day experiences. Most often the activities chosen were sports. Sports provided opportunities for these gifted girls to connect with peers in a non-academic setting, and, they felt, gave them a sense of normalcy and connection in their lives. Being active in school and sports provides these gifted girls with balance that helped them in their daily functioning as a gifted girl in sixth and seventh grade.

The balance that they found that helped them in their daily functioning also helped them to feel normal. The participants found that being a gifted girl led to a feeling of difference. These gifted girls noticed that they are smarter. They got their work done quicker, and they were much more driven then their non-gifted peers. They

also had a different relationship with teachers and higher expectations placed on them. All of these things contributed to the participants expressing that they often felt different. Feeling different had the potential to feel isolating and produce some anxiety. One way these participants coped with these feelings was to do things that helped them feel normal. Participating in sports, student government, music, etc. were important to their experience, in that participating in these activities contributed to their feeling normal.

In these non-academic activities, they were often seen as the same as their peers. Participation in non-academic activities also contributed to their sense of self and their identity as a gifted girl. The participants stated that these opportunities provided them an opportunity to be "more than just gifted." They were able to have a broader spectrum of areas in their lives that were important to them and their functioning. Participating in extra-curricular activities also provided them with friendships that were not about school. They were not the girl in class with a really high IQ, but another girl on the soccer team. These gifted girls often took a leadership role in these extra-curricular activities, but there was still a sense that it was normal and that they were normal. This normalcy provided them with another way to connect with others and a way to maintain friendships. These participants expressed that their extracurricular programs contributed to their success in this time of transition. Having strength in music or sports took the attention off gifted girls' intelligence and put it into areas that could be more widely seen, like a music concert or soccer match. These activities also provided another component of their sense of self, their identity.

These gifted girls negotiated balance between being driven, wanting to meet expectations, and wanting to fit in. The way they navigated school was done without a lot of thought. It stemmed from their identity as a gifted girl. Having a sense of self contributed immensely to the way in which these gifted girls saw giftedness and interacted in their world. It is what helped them make choices academically that allowed them to fit in and stay connected and was a critical component of the experience of sixth and seventh grade for these gifted girls.

Connecting was another critical facet of the experience of the participants. Feeling normal and fitting in emerged as the most important component of sixth and seventh grade for these gifted girls. How well they fit in and how connected they felt with peers was of central importance to these participants. These participants had a different experience fitting in with gifted peers than non-gifted peers. They also experienced a shift in their relationships and the way they felt connected. The participants found that fitting in with gifted peers was easy and the most comfortable. With gifted peers, they were able to truly be themselves. They did not have to hide their giftedness. With non-gifted peers the participants found that social navigation was more difficult. One of the key components to keeping social connections with non-gifted peers was minimizing, or hiding, their giftedness. For these participants, hiding their giftedness came in the form of not always answering the questions in class, not sharing grades, or having to complain about the difficulty of an assignment that was not difficult. This hiding served two purposes for these gifted girls. The first was that it kept them from standing out too much. Second, it protected their friends' feelings and their relationships.

Protecting their relationships with peers was critical. Girls, in general, learn about themselves through relationships. For girls to develop a sense of who they are, they must continue to connect with other girls. The participants expressed not wanting to make their friends feel bad about their academic abilities. They inherently wished to nurture their relationships, and hiding giftedness was one way this could be done. Hiding giftedness did not feel harmful or negative to the gifted girls in this study; it was a way that they balanced being smart and maintaining their friendships.

The participants expressed that their relationships with their friends changed as they got older. They noticed that when with their friends, they began to talk about topics at a deeper level and with more variety. They stopped "playing" with their friends and start "hanging out." During this time, they began to focus their attention more externally to boys, clothes, and sports. There was a change in the amount of freedom they had from their parents. They often went out someplace rather than someone's house to be together. All of these changes contributed to the level of connection that these girls felt with their friends. These gifted girls reported having a deeper connection with non-gifted peers. Whether that was a result of wanting to move away from their giftedness or a product of a shift in their focus of what is important was unknown by the participants. It may have been both. This change in connection is successful for gifted girls who have richness in their own lives to share. These participants found that other gifted girls who focus entirely on academic success struggle as their relationships begin to change. The participants found that having more balance in their lives helped them make this developmental shift easier.

Another important component to the transition of these participants was the way they saw themselves in connection to others. As already discussed, the participants made choices about how they would function academically and socially and the importance of fitting in. They were able to recognize the behaviors that they would need to engage in to fit in, such as not discussing academics, having balance in their lives, and working to have friends beyond their gifted peers. These insights, along with their own clear understanding of what was important in their lives, stemmed from their own sense of self. These gifted girls had a sense of belonging with friends and family from early on in their lives, and they carried that with them as they began to form their own independent identity. These gifted girls found that, because they had that sense of belonging, they had a less difficult time in making choices about whether or not to hide their giftedness. The choice to hide this part of them did not come at a high cost, because they were confident in who they were at the core. These participants expressed that hiding their giftedness was more like being good friends than giving up a part of themselves.

In summary, the experience of these gifted girls transitioning from elementary school to sixth and seventh was not as difficult as the literature had stated. With a strong sense of identity, these gifted girls were able to balance their desire to work hard academically and their interest in extra-curricular activities. In being able to balance their academic lives, they were able to make friends and build connections. The connections they made in turn contributed to their sense of self and their experiences of sixth and seventh grade.

Limitations

This grounded theory on the experience of transitioning from elementary

school to sixth and seventh grade for gifted girls provided details of this event that

were based on the data collected during the interview process. These details included

the individuals view of giftedness, the way they connected with others, and their sense

of self. This research utilized grounded theory methodology to create, validate, and

understand the experience from the participants' perspective. The methodology

included specific procedures to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. The

procedures addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

throughout the research process. However, as in any research, limitations to the

findings were considered.

Several procedures were used to increase credibility. The first one was a

prolonged engagement. The use of prolonged engagement helps to build trust, helps

the researcher learn the participants' culture, and helps to prevent any misinformation

being generated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I met with the research participants

individually three times over a period of 4 months. A focus group was also conducted

following the completion of the individual interviews. Given my skills as a counselor

and interviewer, I am confident that this time frame was enough to build trust and

rapport. I am also aware that working with the participants for a longer period of time

may have had an impact on the findings, as they would have moved further into sixth

or seventh grade, which may have affected their experiences.

The next procedure used to enhance credibility was the use of confirming cases

to triangulate the data. Throughout the process, three high school students were

interviewed to provide data that confirmed the data collected from the younger

participants. These participants offered another view of the experience that was

compared with the younger participants' views. Their experience fit with the

experience of the younger participants, and they were able to support the findings.

Multiple literature reviews were also used to triangulate the findings. A

literature review was conducted after each round of interviews, and coding was

completed. The main findings from that round were compared to current literature to

provide another level of credibility for the findings. The review of the literature may

also have had limitations in that the articles in the literature tended to have much the

same information, and few of the articles were based on qualitative research with

participants of similar age. Most of the information was based on anecdotal data or

quantitative data from large sample sizes. This limited resource in the literature is

another limitation of the study.

Peer debriefing and controlling for researcher bias was also used throughout

the study to increase credibility. Peer debriefing was used to insure that researcher bias

was not influencing the findings. My peers were able to ask me questions about my

findings that required me to look at the information from another perspective and to

keep my biases in check. Before entering the research, I considered my biases and

made them clear at the onset. My biases were (a) I believed I would find that the

pressure to fit in and be part of a group outweighs the need to express their giftedness,

(b) I believed I would find these girls to be confused about what they wanted to be and

who they thought they should be, and (c) I believed that their teachers and parents

would not fully understand their giftedness and their struggles. By being clear about

my biases and working with peers, I was able to limit the impact of my biases upon analysis and theory. A limitation to the research is that no matter how much I worked to keep my biases out, they are a part of my worldview and could have been a factor in my data analysis.

Finally, member checks were utilized to increase the credibility of the study. A focus group was conducted with three of the participants. Four of the participants were no longer available. Member checks gave the participants an opportunity to insure that their experiences were reflected in the findings. It was also an opportunity to discuss their experiences of participating in a research study. The participants found the findings to reflect accurately their experiences of sixth and seventh grade. One limitation to doing the member checking in a focus group setting is that members may not feel as comfortable expressing themselves, however this did not seem to be a limitation in this research. Another limitation to this research is that only three of the participants were available for the focus group.

Procedures were also in place to address transferability. Transferability is the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings. From this study, there are several factors to consider related to transferability. The sample size was small, with participants of various multiple socio-economic status but of only one ethnic background. Professionals who work with gifted students provided the participant sample. These particular students stood out due to their articulate nature and other factors that are unknown. These participants may have been better adjusted than others, and their adjustment should be considered when evaluating for transferability. I have included detailed descriptions of the content of the study along with study

procedures and participants. The procedures were included so that others can review the research and make decisions, based on their population, regarding the extent to which these findings will be applicable to their setting. This research cannot be transferred to all gifted girls in this age range, which is a limitation to the study.

Dependability and confirmability were supported together, as they are interrelated. They both speak to the extent to which the research is reproducible and how it fits with the participants' views. Member checking was the best way to insure that the research was confirmable. In terms of dependability, an audit trail was kept and can be made available for others to replicate the study. The audit trail of this research includes the raw data (the audiotapes were destroyed to protect confidentiality), analyzed data, process notes, and research development notes. This information is available if needed and helps support the trustworthiness of the findings.

This study met the criteria of trustworthy research. Through the use of techniques that promote credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the grounded theory not only represented the experience of the participants but also provided information useful to other settings and studies. The major limitations of the study were the use of interviews over a 4-month time frame, the use of the literature for triangulation, the limitations of focus group, and the lack of ethnic diversity of the participants.

<u>Implications</u>

This qualitative research study has developed a grounded theory of the experience of sixth and seventh grade for gifted girls. This theory focuses on the way a

strong sense of self informs giftedness and a sense of connectedness with others. The experience of these research participants was unique to other research with this population. Given the uniqueness of the findings, there are implications for both counselor educators and counselors-in-training. There are also implications for further research with this population.

<u>Counselor educators</u>

This theory does not fit with other literature in the field that reports on how difficult this transition can be and the pathologizing of the minimization of giftedness. Counselor educators instruct developing counselors on theories of development and types of therapies that are effective with clients at this developmental stage. Typically, giftedness is not addressed in counselor education curriculum, or it is addressed in a very limited matter. This theory provides counselor educators with a framework of one group of gifted girls' experience of giftedness that can be utilized as a tool for counselor educators when discussing the development of pre-adolescents.

Counselor educators can also take from this theory the perspective that developing a strong identity and strong connections to peers and family assists gifted girls in moving through this stage more successfully. When educating counselors who will be working in schools or agencies with girls this age, it is important to teach the importance of identity development and connections. This theory also provides counselor educators with additional support for the use of non-traditional developmental models when educating about gender development and differences for boys and girls. These research participants clearly demonstrate that their identity

development matches with a feminist perspective much more closely than the dominant perspectives of identity development.

Counselor educators are obligated to teach from a perspective that is inclusive of non-dominant groups. Gender seems to be an area that the field of counseling is no longer discussing. The field has shifted its focus to other areas of diversity, such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This shift, while important, has left an impression that gender is no longer an important difference. This research provides a reminder to counselor educators that training developing counselors on the differences in development between the two genders is critical.

Finally, this research can be used by counselor educators to instruct developing counselors on the importance of advocating for the needs of this population. One component of the theory is that gifted girls, once identified, need access to resources. These girls are most able to be themselves when they are in classes with other gifted students and when they are working at a level that is appropriate for their capabilities. Counselor educators can pass on to counselors, especially school counselors, the unique role that they are in to make a difference for these students in schools. Advocating for resources for gifted girls is critical for their success. Counselor educators can also use this research to do their own advocacy in their local school districts. There is still a view that gifted girls are fine and smart and do not need anything. This research helps to dispel that myth.

Counselors-in-training

This research has implications for counselors in training who will be working in both schools and agencies. For school counselors, this research helps to combat the

other literature on the mental health of gifted girls and the view that gifted girls struggle to the point where they have difficulty fitting in and where giving up giftedness is pathologized. This research demonstrates that, for gifted girls at this age, fitting in is the most important component of their lives, but these participants have managed to fit in, feel connected, and feel whole. This research also demonstrates that while there is a hiding or minimizing of giftedness in some settings, hiding giftedness is done in order to maintain connections and does not always feel bad.

This research also educates counselors-in-training on the importance of fitting in and finding connections in the schools. For counselors working with gifted students who are struggling, this awareness can help counselors focus their work with the students. Rather than focusing on their classroom behaviors, they can focus on other areas that students might be interested in. The importance of non-academic activities is clear in this research and should be a part of school counselors' work with gifted girls. A need for balance and connection with others can also be a focus of counseling. Counselors can work with gifted students on getting to know themselves and developing a sense of self. There are several models of counseling that may be useful with this population including solution-focused, feminist, narrative and group therapies.

<u>Future research</u>

This grounded theory research has explored the experience of sixth and seventh grade for gifted girls. From this research came an understanding of their view of giftedness and how that view informs their daily functioning. The importance of feeling connected, feeling normal, and fitting in was understood as critical to the

experience. The way that a strong sense of self can influence all other decisions in life and can help provide a solid base for making difficult decisions was also understood as the backbone of academic transition. Counselor educators and researchers could use this research as the foundation for further research in any of these areas.

I am interested in deepening the understanding of the way in which these girls connect to others and what that connection means for their identity development. Several authors have contributed research in this area, but these girls seemed to have a different experience than girls previously researched. It will be important to understand what has changed and what that change means in terms of development and counseling.

Another area that is interesting is this population's view of gender as part of their identity. The participants in this research spoke very little about gender differences, and when asked about it, they cited very few differences that they noticed, particularly the younger participants. The research in this area speaks primarily to the acquisition of gender consistency and a general understanding of gender differences. I had expected to hear more from the participants about their identity as a girl, and gender did not seem to be a part of their conscious experiences. Whether this is a developmental issue or an issue of awareness is not known but would be an interesting follow up.

Generally speaking, similar studies with more diverse populations will be important to the field. Future studies will add strength to these findings, or they will provide another experience from which counselors can draw. Similar studies with girls of a slightly different age will also be important. Looking at the experience of

transitioning from eighth grade to high school will provide a deeper level of understanding of how these findings might change with older girls. Studies such as these could add to the discussions about the needs of this population, both academically and socially.

Conclusion

Sixth, seventh, and twelfth grade gifted girls shared their perceptions and experiences of transitioning from elementary school to sixth and seventh grade. Through data analysis, a theory of those experiences was created and confirmed. These girls described the importance of having balance in their lives and of ensuring that they participated in sports, student government, and music. This balance contributed to their feeling normal and feeling connected to others. They found that being successful in sixth and seventh grade was dependent on fitting in, and they often had to make choices to hide their giftedness in order to fit in. This hiding was for them a way to protect friendships, to be courteous to others, and to keep from standing out. They shared that these skills are an important part of life and that they hold no negative feelings about this choice.

These gifted girls have a strong sense of who they are, and it is this sense of self that guides their choices and connections with others. They do not mind not answering questions in class repeatedly. They know they know the answer and that is enough. It is with this strong identity that they are able to be successful in a challenging environment. These girls have shown that making adjustments to their interactions with others can make a huge difference in how they are perceived and how they fit in. They share a voice of strength that is inspirational and powerful.

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