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EIGHT AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS

AND THE TEACHERS THEY VIEW AS INFLUENTIAL

A Multiple Case Study

by

Tamyra Pickering

A DISSERTATION

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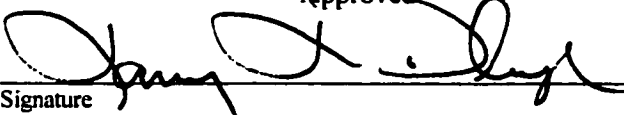
DISSERTATION TITLE

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BY

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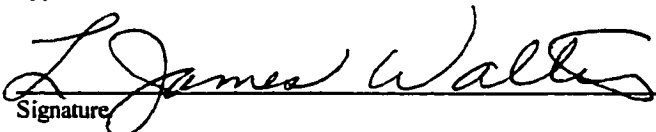Typed Name

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EIGHT AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS

AND THE TEACHERS THEY VIEW AS INFLUENTIAL

A Multiple Case Study

Tamyra Pickering, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2002

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The purpose of this collective multiple case study was to explore eight at-risk, high school girls' relationships with their present and former teachers using in-depth interviews, journals, drawings, observations, and a focus group. The goal for this research was to describe from the students' perspective what they valued, thought, felt, and saw in their relationships with teachers.

This multiple case study has importance in the educational arena because teachers are in a position to critically influence girls and their success in school. Each at-risk girl identified unique themes to her case in their recollection of experiences with teachers.

Four themes emerged from this multiple case study; The Girls Said Teachers Should Be Allies to Students, The Girls Described Relationships With Teachers Who Were Distant. The Girls Said Good Teachers Are Supporters To Students, and At Times School Seemed Pointless to the Girls. The awareness of when teachers should approach these girls and when they should hold back was critical in developing influential relationships described by the eight at-risk high school girls in this study.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This chapter includes a brief backdrop of research concerning female adolescent

relationships with teachers, the research problem, purpose of this study, research

procedure, and role of the researcher, delimitations, limitations, and the significance of this

study. The eight at-risk high school females whose voices are heard in this dissertation

are unique in their plight, but alike in their yearning to develop relationships with

teachers. The researcher's hope is that the reader will listen closely to their words, and

take the essence of their experiences to better develop important relationships with all

students.

P.S.

I wrote you those nice poems only because the honest ones would frighten you
- From poems by Jewel Kilcher (1998) A Night Without Armor, page 116

The characteristics that girls describe as influential in relationships include

acceptance, mutuality, spending time together and having fun. Some of these

characteristics are at odds with the expectations and limits of teachers' roles. Acceptance

and spending time together were not identified when Sullivan (1997), asked female high

school respondents to discuss their perceptions of their relationships with teachers.

Female students from Sullivan's study (1997), wrote, "She discouraged my learning,"

"she told me to give up my dreams", "she was prejudiced", "she showed her

incompetence in class and was close-minded", "demeaning", and demonstrated "very

traditional 'boys are better' type influence" in class (p. 157). Other data themes

determined by Sullivan (1997), included "teachers do not listen or understand girls,

betray girls or lie. do not care about or dislike girls", and "wouldn't see me" or "didn't appreciate" the girls (p. 157).

Sadker and Sadker (1994). discovered in their research that some girls take inconspicuous seats in the back of the room or in the corners to avoid talking in class. They check where the teacher never looks and then sit there. They raise their hands halfway. If it looks as though the teacher might actually call on them, they change their raised arm to a yawn. a stretch, or some other movement. They use a once-in-a-while approach to classroom interaction; and answer every now and then, so the "teacher will think they are making an effort in class" (p. 91).

Sadker and Sadker (1994) spent more than a decade, and thousands of hours of classroom observations. analyzing interactions in classrooms. According to these researchers. female students in every high school have shared similar stories that include such statements as:

In my science class the teacher never calls on me, and I feel like I don't exist. The other night I had a dream that I vanished.

I have teachers who behave as if I'm an ornament and less able to achieve than guys. They don't seem to take girls seriously. and they treat us in a semi mocking way. Is how I look more important than how I think?

It seems to me teachers treat girls in one of two ways. They either ignore them and choose to interact with boys. or they treat girls as sex objects by being especially nice to the ones they find attractive. I think this hurts all girls emotionally.

I have a teacher who calls me "airhead" and "ditz." I used to think I was smart, but now I don't know. Maybe I'm not. What if he's right? The more he treats me like an airhead. the more I think maybe I am (p. 134).

Sadker and Sadker (1994) have reported, as these girls are "taught to devalue themselves"; they also begin to "doubt the validity of their senses" (p. 134). Girls struggle to accommodate different aspects of their personalities, and they look to parents. teachers, classmates. and friends for reactions. Girls use "these reactions as a yardstick to measure themselves" (p. 100). When comparing school levels Sadker and Sadker (1994) found that "eighty percent of girls say they are happy about themselves in elementary school. thirty-seven percent answer affirmatively in middle school, and only twenty-nine percent in high school" (p. 78).

Teachers are in a position to help girls develop positive views of themselves. Teachers are also in a position to help girls develop an understanding of the obstacles some women must overcome in a society where their options and opportunities can be limited by issues such as at-risk or gender stereotypes (Brown, 1991; Galbo, 1989; and Sullivan. 1997).

Research Problem

Relations with adults other than parents have, for the most part, been ignored in empirical studies. Adult siblings and extended family members have generally not been considered in studies of adolescent social influence. The influence of teachers. youth leaders. and adult co-workers is widely debated...Yet there is little empirical information about the extent to which nonparental adults play significant roles in the social development of adolescents (Blyth, Hill & Smith-Thiel. 1982, p. 426)

A review of literature indicates there is a considerable amount of data regarding the adults adolescents perceive as important, however there is a lack in that research data concerning the depth and breadth of significant teacher relationships (Galbo, 1984; Sullivan, 1997). Adolescents' perceptions of the teachers they view as influential have not been widely explored. Clark-Lempers, Lempers and Ho (1991) asked adolescents specifically about their "most important teacher," and found the ratings to be consistently low. These authors concluded, like Galbo (1989) that "teachers do not exert much influence on adolescent lives in general" (p.311).

In previous research, attempts have not been made to acquire breadth to the meanings and implications of various adolescent responses toward their perceptions of their teachers. Unfortunately, most research concerning adolescents' perceptions of influential adults have been obtained through surveys which limits our knowledge of adolescents' perceptions of influential teachers, therefore further in-depth investigations are necessary for educators.

In the past 17 years, research projects have focused on listening to the voices of adolescent girls (Apter, 1990; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990; Gilligan, Rodger, & Tolman, 1991; Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988; and Sidel, 1990). These studies investigated longitudinally and cross sectionally the comprehensive ways adolescent girls speak about themselves and their relationships.

Most of these studies, nevertheless, have focused primarily on White, middle- and upper-class adolescent girls. Only a few research projects have attempted to listen to urban, poor, or working-class adolescent girls speak about their lives over time.

Consequently, current theories of adolescent girls' psychological development rarely

reflect qualitatively the experiences of a working class population of girls (Way, 1995,

p. 108).

Additionally, the existing research on urban, poor, and working-class adolescence

has concentrated almost exclusively on high-risk behavior or high-risk groups such as

teenage mothers, dropouts, or gang members rather than on a diverse group of urban,

adolescent girls. Furthermore, this same research has focused mostly on research

methods that utilized likert-type scales and true/false questionnaires to obtain information

(Way. 1995. p. 108).

Furthermore, studies of influential teacher relationships were completed 13 or

more years ago (Galbo. 1984, 1989). It would make sense from a researcher's perspective

to want to find out if youths' values could have changed in the last 30 years. further

supporting a need for this research project. Updated information about adolescents'

perceptions of interactions with teachers would help determine if certain assumptions are

still accurate (Galbo. 1984). The results of this researcher's findings will be based on

female youths' own perceptions. Their perceptions may help provide a more complete

in-depth picture regarding female adolescents and influential teacher relationships than

currently exists.

Purpose of Study

The education system should provide students with opportunities, encourage

their intellectual growth. and prepare them as citizens. Among the most important effects

on girls in school are differential patterns of achievement associated with different

classroom experiences. According to some research identified within the American

Association of University of Women Report (1992), teachers generally interact with, and

encourage boys more in class. This same report also indicated that teachers send subtle messages concerning their lower expectations of girls. Experiences for female students included subtle but powerful differences in the ways teachers interact with girls compared with boys. thus "supporting female disengagement rather than relationship building in schools" (p. 97).

The purpose of this collective multiple case study was to explore eight at-risk. high school students' relationships with their present and former teachers using in-depth interviews. journaling. drawings. observations. and a focus group. The goal for this research was to describe from the students' perspective what they value. think. feel. and see in their relationships with teachers. The girls that participated in this study are assumed to be the authority of their own experiences. The researcher also used as much of the students' language as possible to describe their experiences in order to paint the most accurate picture of their perceptions of relationships with teachers. This multiple case study was an opportunity to observe, analyze, and describe the phenomenon of influential teacher relationships as perceived by eight female at-risk high school students.

Definition of Terms

At-Risk Factors -	any event, condition, or characteristic that increases the probability of the occurrence of an identified target outcome like pregnancy. high school drop out, attendance. behavior issues, poverty, drugs, or alcohol (Pianta and Walsh, 1996, p. 17)
Connection -	identified thoughts and perceptions of a relationship
Disengagement -	detached or withdrawn behavior or feeling
Facilitate -	to guide students to interpret their ideas, to formulate additional questions and cognitively stimulate more responses, and to encourage respondents to initiate their own questions

Feminist Perspective -	evaluation of events according to advocacy of social equality for women; a way of looking at the females as a celebration of importance
Feminist Theory -	gender is a social construction that groups construct to meet their needs and expectations (Rider, 2000, p. 86)
Flippant Responses -	abrupt, disrespectful, insulting or arrogant statements
In-Depth -	indicators of respondents being cognitively challenged; researcher's use of wait time as a strategy to provide more opportunities for respondents to formulate their thoughts; indicators that respondents answers were not easy to determine or flippant; responses that generate knowledge, and responses that indicate challenging thoughtful ideas
Intuitive -	having instinctive knowledge, or an impulsive response as a result of one's perception
Participant Observation -	researcher enters the world of the respondents to be studied; researcher gets to know, be known, and trusted by participants, and systematically keeps a detailed written record of what is heard and observed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 2)
Perception -	having or showing insight or understanding
Influential -	important and significant
Influential Relationship -	important and influential way in which one thing is associated or identified with another through a connection or bond
Trust -	a feeling of confidence in a person because of the qualities that one perceives
Multiple Case Study -	two or more cases are studied and then compared and contrasted

Statement of Research Questions

In qualitative research design, an emerging methodology is utilized. The use of research questions guided this study. In a qualitative research project, questions are "Open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional" (Creswell, 1998, p. 99). The grand tour question serves as the overall guiding question and frames the general research inquiry. For this study, the grand tour question is as follows: To what extent are teachers perceived as influential adults by at risk girls?

The sub-questions were developed around the issues of the respondents. The sub-questions were extracted from the respondents and their understanding of their relationships with teachers. While gathering images from the respondents, the different events they shared evolved into common ideas. Then through analysis and previous observations ideas emerged into themes confirming the images presented by these respondents (Creswell, 1998, p. 105).

The following sub-questions provided a general framework to guide the initial research:

- How do female students describe their educational experiences?

- What experiences do female students divulge when asked about their relationships with teachers?

- How do female students describe their relationships with teachers?

- What do female students perceive as preconditions for developing influential relationships with teachers?

- What do female students describe as evidence that guided them toward developing influential relationships with teachers?

- What do female students describe as evidence that guided them

  away from developing influential relationships with teachers?

The following topical questions served as a guide through the steps in the procedures of data collection, analysis, and narrative format construction. Topical sub questions serve as chaperons for the driving question. Researchers use topical sub questions to anticipate needs for specific procedural information in the study (Creswell, 1998. p.255).

- How will female students describe their relationships with teachers?

- What themes emerge from gathering information about the case?

- How will I interpret these themes using a feminist perspective?

- How will I guide these females through the process of self-discovery and

  empowerment from their experiences with teachers?

Procedure: Design of the Study

Research participants were recruited from a mid-western high school with a total enrollment of 1,800 students. The principal and the researcher used the end of the year failure listing for the 1998-99 school year to solicit participants for the study. Out of 22 girls, 10 girls were selected from the 1998-99 Ninth Grade failure list. Ten randomly selected girls were contacted through their homeroom teachers to meet with the researcher during their lunch period on Monday, May 24, 1999. The girls were told that they were going to meet with a researcher that was also an elementary principal to discuss a research study about teachers. The girls were also told that the researcher wanted them to bring a pencil and critique questions that could be used in the study. From the listing of ten, five of the girls were in school on Monday, May 24, 1999.

Since the meeting was during the lunch period an assistant principal from the high school gathered ten more females from the cafeteria to participate in the meeting. The assistant principal knew the research study focused on at-risk female students. When he gathered students he selected females he knew could fit the researcher's criteria.

During the meeting the girls were told about the study and provided a list of seven questions to critique (see Appendix A). The girls were invited to participate in the study. Interested girls were provided a packet that included necessary IRB forms to review with their parents and asked to return the forms by the end of the week (see Appendix B). No forms were returned by May 28, 1999. Therefore, it was assumed none of the girls contacted wanted to participate.

The principal then recommended approaching the female students that would be attending the alternative high school summer school program. The principal also provided the name of a teacher at the alternative high school that would assist in contacting the possible participants for the research project.

During the first day of summer school classes the researcher met with the female students to explain the research project. The purpose and scope of the study was reviewed with the possible participants. The girls were told that the project would involve six girls. The summer school teacher told the girls that if they took time to participate in the study she would allow them to eliminate one of their English units. Interested girls took packets to review with their parents including the necessary IRB forms (see Appendix B). The girls were asked to return the forms by the end of the week. Eight girls returned the appropriate forms. The researcher decided to include all eight girls in case one or two girls dropped out over the course of the study.

Each girl and their parent signed an informed consent form approved by IRB stating that none of the girls were compensated for time spent with the researcher, or given class credit, nor were their grades affected for participating in the study. Since the summer school teacher told the girls she would eliminate one of their assignments if they choose to participate in the study, the researcher made an effort to obtain each girl's rationale for participating. Each girl was asked why she wanted to participate in the study during her first interview with the researcher. Only Stasa (Case 7) indicated she participated because she did not have to do one of her assignments. Carmen (Case 2) said she participated because she thought it was interesting, plus the opportunity to "have that free unit thing." The other six girls indicated they participated, either because they wanted people to know about the "good" teachers, or ones they did not like. These same girls stated it would "help" teachers to do "stuff different, instead of the way they do things." The researcher chose to believe that the participants were honest in their comments about teachers and were participating in the study because they were interested.

Interviews for the study included two individual interviews and two focus group interviews. Seven participants requested interviews take place during the summer school hours. One female participant requested that her interviews be scheduled after summer school hours. Each participant returned the necessary IRB forms prior to participation in any of the interviews.

Informed consent was discussed in detail at the initial recruitment meeting, and again at the first interview. An emphasis was placed on confidentiality. Regrettably, the researcher realized not all of the girls would be equally articulate or perceptive during the interviews. The researcher realized during the first interview some of the respondents

would need time to feel comfortable with the researcher before they would relay their opinions about former and present teacher relationships.

At the conclusion of the study, 24 out of 32 interviews took place; 4 out of 8 journals, and 2 out of 8 sketchbooks were turned in to the researcher. None of the girls' grades were affected because they missed an interview, or did not turn in their journal or sketchbook. None of the girls were compensated for the time they spent with the researcher, given class credit, and their grades were not affected for participating in the study, therefore IRB approval was not compromised.

Each participant was allowed to choose her own pseudonym for the research. Three participants selected pseudonym names. Five participants said they did not care, so the researcher selected those names. All individual interviews were tape recorded using an audiocassette recorder during June and July 1999. The focus group interviews were videotape recorded using a video camera during June and July 1999. The in-depth interviews allowed the participants to participate in a conversation with the researcher for a purpose. Interviews averaged from 45 to 60 minutes in length and focused upon the participants' school experiences with teachers, influential or inspiring teachers and any additional information the respondents chose to divulge.

Initially in June 1999, the girls were promised the opportunity to review their interview transcripts once transcribed. The 15 individual interviews and 2 focus group interviews were not completely transcribed until December 2001. By December 2001, the research participants had left high school because they either graduated or dropped out, and were unavailable for member checks.

Role of the Researcher

The ability to draw more in-depth information was perceived as more likely at the high school level than at the elementary level. All of the researcher's expertise was fundamentally at the elementary school level. It was perceived that students at the high school level had more years of experience with teachers than those at the elementary level, and had more experiences to draw upon. The researcher hoped the girls would view the researcher as a facilitator that knew much about elementary schools, but lacked the knowledge of the middle school and high school cultures. The researcher viewed the girls as experts of their school experiences with teachers during this research study.

A researcher's interpretation of phenomena is constructed by her "mood, experience and intent" (Stake, 1995, p.133). A researcher involved in a qualitative study is also the instrument for data collection and analysis. As result, it is essential for the researcher to disclose any predisposed judgments, values, and biases at the outset of the study (Creswell, 1994). Reviewing school experience, the researcher remembered three influential teachers, at third grade, sixth grade, and a high school English teacher. These teachers were influential because they provided time to dispense attention and encouragement to students in their classes. In reviewing some school documents the sixth grade teacher once wrote a note to the researcher stating "always remember what you say is important!" The researcher was described by teachers as very, very quiet and shy. The researcher remembered each teacher as one who tried to get her to overcome her shyness.

Instrumental case studies help readers understand phenomena within it. The need for categorical data and measurements are great with intrinsic case studies (Stake, 1995). Intrinsic studies focus on the case requiring study uniqueness. Studying more than one

case within the same project is referred to as a collective case study (Creswell, 1998). Each case "serves a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry" (Yin, 1994, p. 45).

This collective, multiple case study will help to understand the phenomena of influential teacher relationships as well as focus on the uniqueness of eight adolescent girls. The participants did not complete some course work, thus placing them at-risk and behind their age mates. Additional criteria for the female high school participants included attendance or behavioral concerns as determined by the school officials.

Biases brought to this study were grounded in the researcher's personal philosophy and experiences of developing relationships with children. The researcher believed that all children develop a relationship with caring adults when adults take time to seek them out. The researcher's experiences, interests, and preferences shaped the design of this study, the collection, analysis of data and, ultimately the descriptions of each case. Therefore, it is important to explore the researcher's background brought to this study.

Beginning in 1980, and for almost ten years thereafter the researcher volunteered with young single mothers as a Parent Aide through the State Department of Social Services. As a Parent Aide the researcher developed an interest in establishing relationships with females in crisis. The Parent Aide Program required a one-year relationship with a young mother, most often a high school drop out. The purpose of the year relationship focused on assisting the young parent toward establishing a more positive relationship with their child(ren). It was during this time period that the researcher first became interested in influential relationships and how they unfold. The

researcher's interest in influential relationships with at-risk females emerged from the experience as a Parent Aide.

Delimitations

The study was delimited as follows:

- The eight females participating in the study were non-representative of the school general population, therefore a unique group.

- The girls participating in the study were assumed to be interested in the purpose of the study. The girls were assumed to be willing to learn and grow from this experience.

- The researcher did seek the administration's recommendation from the select group of female students so participants were purposely selected. The rationale of the administration's recommendations was accepted by the researcher based upon the gatekeepers' understanding from the researcher's description of this project.

Limitations

The researcher requested girls to volunteer their participation in the study from a select group of at-risk females; therefore the researcher was only looking at a specific group of female students at one school that were willing participants. This specific group of female students may represent a limited perception of their relationships with teachers, therefore could be considered an inherent weakness in the design.

1.01 *Individual Interviews*

The primary method of gathering data focused mainly on interviews. What the girls divulged depended upon their maturity levels, skill of the researcher in drawing out information, and the ability of the researcher to facilitate as well as allow the girls to lead

the discussion at other times. The skill of the researcher in guiding these female students to divulge their perceptions impacted the results of this study and could be considered an inherent weakness in the design.

The questions during the interviews reflected the interest of the participants that constructed them through one on one discussions between the researcher and the female members. The instrument used in this study was the researcher guided by the respondents. The girls' willingness or unwillingness to divulge information to the researcher and other participants could be a weakness in the design of the study.

The researcher observed and participated in the interviews in a collaborative manner. The interviews were set up according to the girls' and the researcher's schedule. The time spent with each girl was not equal since some girls took longer to interview than others. A few girls did not attend every scheduled interview. Therefore, conclusions were affected by contact time with the interviewees.

When learning about each informant in detail. the individual interview had an advantage compared to other methods. Each girl developed a different relationship with the researcher. thus the kinds of information details each girl shared was different in intensity and quality, and could be considered another weakness in the design.

1.02 Focus Group

A secondary method of gathering data included the formation of a focus group. Group discussion provided direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from separate statements from each interviewee. The focus group required greater attention to the role of the moderator and provided less depth and detail about the opinions and experiences of the participants. The issue of "depth in a focus group assumes that the

participants have more to say" (Morgan, 1997, p.11). This was not true for each of the respondents. There was a possibility that the individual and group interviews would produce different results. It was determined that the girls that acted differently in groups compared to their individual interviews simply documented different aspects of each girls' overall behavior pattern. a weakness in the design of the study.

Another limitation in this study was the researcher's ability to be objective. Since the researcher is also an educational professional who cares about children; it was essential that the researcher be aware of her relationship with each individual female student. It was also imperative that the researcher be aware of any dependency developed by the respondents. It was essential that the researcher prepared respondents to end the project when it needed to end by being cognizant of emotional connections any of the respondents developed with the researcher. The researcher did not perceive any dependency developed by the respondents at the end of the study. It was also essential that the researcher remained as objective as possible when analyzing the data so that the information reported was accurate. It was easy for the researcher to remain objective in this study since the data collected in 1999 was analyzed in 2002. The length of time from gathering data to analyzing data allowed the researcher to easily remain objective.

The results of this study are not generalizable other than to these eight female students. The researcher was more interested in obtaining universal statements of general social processes and perspectives from each of the eight female students: rather than statements of commonalities between similar high school settings.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance to four educational purposes,

- First, this study provides information that may encourage staff to reflect

upon their own teaching practices by gaining some insight from what female students revealed about their relationships with teachers.

• Second. teachers and administrators interested in altering the ways they interact with girls may be provided some insight from these female students and their individual cases.

• Third. this study provides researchers with a foundation for further study on the impact of influential relationships between teachers and female students.

• Finally. researchers can use this study to assist them as they continue to explore the development of influential relationships between teachers and female students.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Lost .....is a puzzle of stars that breathes like water and chews like stone

Alone .....is a reminder of how far acceptance is from understanding

Fear .....is a bird that believes itself into extinction

Desperation .....the honest recognition of a false truth

Hope .....seeing who you really are at your highest is who you will become

Grace..... the refinement of a Soul through time

-From poems by Jewel Kilcher (1998) <u>A Night without Armor</u> , page 94

Adolescent Perceptions of Influential Adults

Hauck (1971) found that "the primary reason youths made contact with a

significant adult was to talk" (Galbo, 1984. p. 959). Research carried out by the Harvard

Project on Girls' Psychology and Women's Development has shown that women

teachers, particularly at the secondary level, often feel caught in the middle of their

allegiance to the school and their desire to support and develop relationships with girls

(Sullivan. 1997). Sullivan (1997) found from the Harvard Project on Girls' Psychology

and Women's Development that previous research indicated significant relationships with

nonparental adults can enhance adolescents' resilience, but little has been known about

the existence and essence of such relationships, particularly among a diverse group of

girls. Sullivan (1997) conducted longitudinal interviews with twenty-eight Caucasian.

African American. Latino, and Portuguese urban girls considered to be at risk for school

dropout over a three year period and discovered some shocking results. She found that the

presence of women was significant in girls' lives. but teachers were not named as

important. Rather. they had a negative impact (Sullivan, 1997).

Guided by her findings, Sullivan (1997) then surveyed 328 tenth grade girls from

eight urban and suburban high schools. Themes emerged from these high school

respondents and were documented on write-in surveys. These themes identified that teachers discourage female students. favor some students over others, are prejudiced, or simply are judged as bad teachers. She identified that the two most commonly cited reasons girls say teachers had a negative influence on them included, "they criticize girls, making them feel embarrassed or stupid and secondly, women teachers were mean or rude to female students" (Sullivan. 1997. p. 156).

In a review of adolescents' perceptions of influential adults, Heiss (1976) stated, "recent research has shown beyond a reasonable doubt that self-concept is a reflection of the actor's view of other people's view of him or her" (p. 363). How girls perceive their relationship with teachers can have a powerful impact on how they view themselves as a result of that perception. If girls perceive that their teachers are critical of them, they are less likely to trust or want to develop important relationships with educators.

In contrast. academically successful students almost always choose teachers as influential compared to youth who come from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds that "didn't identify teachers as significant" (Garbo, 1983. p. 424). Some research has shown that in school populations where students are economically disadvantaged. there is a need for students to engage in important relationships with teachers for school success. Some students who are economically disadvantaged are also experiencing some form of crisis in their personal lives. It is critical that these students develop an influential relationship with an adult who is able to take time to listen and mentor them throughout their school career.

Unfortunately, many students that find themselves in a disadvantaged environment and do not have adult role models in their home or family that they are able

to turn to for support. This notion further supports the need for influential teacher relationships. These are the same students that do not seek out mentoring relationships with teachers, but rather sit back and cruise through high school disengaged with their school community.

Role Conflict

A theoretical perspective useful in this research project is the psycho-sociological concept of functionally diffuse and functionally specific role relationships. With functionally diffuse role relationships, the teacher or authority figure has a limitless definition and understanding of the scope of responsibility for students. Teachers who hold to a functionally diffused understanding of their role accept a wide range of responsibility for their students. This typically includes being an academic teacher, adult mentor, and a caring listener to adolescents.

In a functionally specific relationship, affiliation is restricted to those elements in the relationship that are defined by the technical knowledge and the institutional status of the participants. In some situations, where the teacher only views his/her role as the academic teacher, there is a clash between his/her role and what female students perceive as necessary in developing an influential relationship with that teacher (Getzels, 1952).

The question of functional specificity is critical in the educational setting. What is "good for the institution" and what is "good for the person" is difficult to define and maintain within an organization (Getzels, 1952, p .241). Should teachers operate in the functionally diffused role by welcoming friendly relationships and encourage a trusting atmosphere or should they simply define their role in specific terms and avoid developing influential relationships with children?

Teachers' involvement in their pupils' lives has been a topic of academic controversy for many years. Some believe that educators "ought to deal with pupils' personal problems and relate to pupils on an individual basis, while others warn teachers against doing so" because of their lack of training (Tatar, 1998, p. 153). The perception of teachers' significance for pupils is not uniform, and it changes according to the characteristics of pupils or educational settings. According to Tatar (1998) many adolescents experience an "increase in teacher control and a decrease in the quality of their affective relationship with their teacher" as they move into secondary schools (p. 154).

Theory surrounding people that are influential is still in its formative stages. However, consensus among researchers conclude that there are persons in one's life who have greater influence than others, and these "significant others contribute to the formation of self-concept" (Galbo. 1984. p. 952). Existing theory on adolescent social networks, resiliency, and girls' psychological and relational development will serve as additional theoretical frameworks for this study. To date, research in these areas provides evidence of the need for, as well as the existence and possibilities of important relationships between girls and women. The pledge "to care for and about children is central to good teaching" (Weinstein, 1998, p. 153).

For teachers that hold a broader perspective of their role, "caring is enacted through interpersonal relationships. curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom management" (Weinstein, 1998, p. 154). Without a doubt, knowledge gained through in-depth reporting of relationships between female adolescents in high school and their teachers would enhance existing research.

Phenomenon of Trust

Sociologist Bernard Barber (1983), claims that trust is evidenced when people

assume (1) "that they will act within a persistent moral order", (2) that "they will perform their technical roles competently", and (3) "roles that require a special concern for others will be faithfully fulfilled" (p. 9). Galbo (1983) found that 88% of adolescent female subjects in a public high school were able to recall a specific incident, which was primarily responsible for their realizing the significance of a particular adult. For the most part these females stated that interactions between adolescents and adults occurred and were nurtured in an informal setting such as an adult's house. Few of the adolescents and adults relationships, about 20%, were initiated in organizational or institutional settings. Although these adolescents liked their teachers, Galbo (1983) found only 7% of the adolescents perceived teachers as significant adults (p. 422).

Trust is essential for personal relationships. The trust in our closest friends is not just a trust that they will keep confidences and, it is not just a trust that they will never hurt us. Typically, we trust the character of our associates, we believe they have adequate ethical trustworthiness to distinguish how they should act in various settings. If this trust is well founded, then "our associates can be trusted to look after and promote our interests" (LaFollette, 1996, p.118).

Chance brings two people into geographical proximity. Finding oneself seated in someone's classroom can have a positive or a negative impact on one's future attitude and behavior. Sometimes chance orchestrates with unique psychological factors to make it more likely that the two will be drawn to each other. Other times an individual may not have any special psychological need for a relationship, but may, after observing someone from a distance, think that person might be a potential friend (LaFollette, 1996).

Trust is an "attitude based on beliefs and expectations about what others are likely to do". When we trust others, "we expect them to act in ways that are helpful, or

at least not harmful to us" (Govier, 1992, p. 17). Teachers should be helpful to students

in their classroom while developing trusting relationships. Trust is necessary for fair and

workable relationships. Trust is the foundation of social order. Personal trust means

"what you trust is that she/he will be a certain kind of person, who, among other things,

will not intentionally harm your interests" (LaFollette, 1996, p. 116). When students sit

in classrooms they are influenced by the overt and covert actions of their teachers.

Students have perceptions of their teachers. A knowledge of these perceptions could

assist educators in developing influential relationships with their students.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes a sketch of a feminist approach, data definition, the process of linking concepts. data. data collection and the analysis procedure that was utilized in this multiple case study. Learning more about girls and their relationships with teachers could assist those that instruct females' everyday in school. This study provided a snap shot of eight female adolescents' perceptions of teachers. The researcher questioned throughout the study if these girls perceived they have had influential relationships with any of their teachers?

A Feminist Approach: The Females' Struggle For Voice

According to Sadker & Sadker (1994). many girls feel helpless, hopeless, and stressed. Sadker & Sadker have also found depressed adolescent girls see little reason to enjoy life or feel optimistic about what lies ahead (p.105). Women may behave in a helpless fashion in order to get their own way (Hochschild. 1973). According to Briles (1987) "Women may help to continue their lower-power status by using power in a quiet covert way " (p. 74). This brings questions to the surface of any classroom environment including: (1) Are girls being elusive. secretive or moody when they don't participate in class? and. (2) Do these girls silence themselves for a reason?

Horchschild (1973) stated when a person doesn't have the power to get something directly; it is sensible to use manipulative strategies to get it. So. when girls sit quietly in class with blank facial expressions, are they being manipulative, and do they identify this behavior as manipulative?

The purpose of this collective multiple case study was to explore eight high school students' relationships with their present and former teachers using in depth

interviews and a focus group approach. It has been documented that feminists have been important in "developing emotion and feeling as topics for research" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992. p. 27).

Numerous writers reiterate the importance of feminist research, and recurring themes have included:

- Feminism is a perspective, not a research method.
- Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods.
- Feminist research aims to create social change.
- Feminist research strives to represent human diversity.
- Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a person.
- Feminist research frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studied (Joyappa & Self. 1996. p. 18).

This study investigated how students feel concerning their relationship with teachers. Feminism affected the content of this research because the researcher was female. How feminism influences the way the research was conducted in this project was a question the researcher was aware of and answered during the study. Feminist thinkers emphasize women's special concern for the "preservation of relationships and their nurturing role" (Govier, 1992, p. 16). As a female researcher, how the researcher-respondent relationship evolved was identified throughout the study. It was critical in this study that the researcher journal her thoughts and feelings during the project. It has been documented in research that girls value relationships with women who "understand more." who "know how it is," and "know what things go on" (Sullivan, 1997, p. 93). According to the AAUW Report (1992) "girls are not receiving equitable

amounts of teacher attention" so influential teacher relationships would seem a natural topic to explore for feminist theory (p. 84).

Issues of relationships identified by eight high school girls were described using a feminist research approach. What eight high school girls thought, felt and did during this collective case study will help teachers gain insight into eight female adolescents' perceptions of their school environment. Interviews were conducted in an interactive manner that embraced "self-disclosure by the researcher", and "foster(ed) a sense of collaboration with the girls", thus supports a feminist research perspective (Creswell, 1998. p. 83).

Feminist methodologies "offer a basis for bridging the gap between research, theory and educational practice" (Joyappa & Self, 1996, p. 16). Researchers must give as well as receive and not treat participants as mere informants. The process of feminist research must be of self-discovery and empowerment. Feminist research is not so much conducted as "facilitated within a community context" (Joyappa & Self, 1996, p. 20). Understanding better the psychological dimensions and issues of these eight high school girls through discussions and observations allowed the opportunity for self-discovery by the participants and the researcher.

Data

A good case study "presents people as complex creatures through their data" (Stake. 1995, p. 97). The term data refers to the rough materials researchers collect from the environment they are studying. The data in this multiple case study included materials the respondents completed during the study, such as tape recordings, interview transcripts and participant observation field notes. Data also included documentation respondents created such as journals, drawings, and other documents (Appendix C). This

data served as "evidence and clues of what is needed to think soundly and deeply while researching" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 106). After returning from each interview, the researcher wrote notes or summaries of what transpired. The researcher depicted a description of people, objects, places, events, activities, and conversations. The successful outcome of a participant observation study relies on detailed, accurate, and extensive field notes. It was "essential that the researcher included sights, smells, and impressions after the interviews because these are elements that a tape recorder lacks" but "are essential in a researcher's search for understanding" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 107).

After each transcript was completed a color was selected to identify each girl. The color code system allowed the researcher to easily keep track of themes within and across the eight cases. By gaining access through the high school administration the researcher was able to obtain some participants' attendance records, transcripts, suspension records and grade reports. Two students were attending summer school from another school system, therefore access was limited with these girls (Appendix D).

<p style="text-align:center">Linking Concepts and Data</p>

The analysis of the qualitative data began with the identification of key themes and patterns. Researchers need to be able to organize, manage, and retrieve the most meaningful bits of their data. The usual way of going about this is by assigning tags or labels to the data based on their concepts. Condensing the essence of the data sets into analyzable units by creating categories are an essential process. The process of condensing data is referred to as coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26).

The researcher started to code the interview transcripts and found that the information was unmanageable. Then the researcher wrote the participant's statements

on 3 x 6 index cards. This process took an extensive amount of time and was more confusing than effective. Finally, the researcher resorted to printing the participants' interviews on different colored paper; each girl was assigned a specific color. The girls' interview transcripts were printed on their assigned color for organizational purposes. The researcher cut apart statements from the transcripts and organized those statements into plastic bag categories that had common elements.

The analytic procedures used to support the coding processes establish a link of various sorts. First, coding links different segments in the data by bringing together fragments of data to create categories of data that have some common elements. Then, coding links data fragments to a particular idea or concept. The important analytic work lies in establishing and thinking about such linkages and not in the typical processes of coding. Coding relates data to our ideas about that data. Codes "link raw data of textual material such as interview transcripts or field notes, to the researcher's theoretical impressions" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 27).

Coding by the plastic baggy method resulted in fifty different categories, which the researcher realized needed to be minimized. Therefore, the researcher went through each plastic baggy and grouped together those statements that related to a larger topic. After this process the researcher purchased several large white poster boards to begin pulling together statements specific to each girl, as well as statements that crossed over each case.

A matrix for each participant that included statements, artifacts and observations was created on the computer. The researcher went through each poster board and

reviewed statements by each participant. Each statement was then pulled off the poster

board and word processed into a group matrix of themes for each girl (see Appendix E).

Issues, key words, processes, or characters that capture the essence of the piece

emerge when reading through data excerpts (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Since coding

involved reading and rereading the data several times, and making selections from that

data, the researcher was deeply involved while interpreting the data. Selecting, cutting up,

fragmenting, recoding and categorizing the data was a lengthy process. According to

Coffey & Atkinson (1996) the "move from coding to interpretation is a crucial one"

(p. 46). While word processing the group matrices for each girl the researcher began to

more deeply interpret the data. It wasn't until the researcher sat down to introduce each

case that all of the final themes emerged for each girl.

The focus group videotapes were also reviewed several times for any additional

observations not noted while previously reviewing the data. The researcher attempted to

closely observe specific girls at each video viewing. Through this process the researcher

created sketches of each girl as they appeared through their words and their actions. Each

girl's sketch was used to help the researcher introduce each case's findings.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), good qualitative research is well

documented with narration taken from the data to illustrate and corroborate the assertions

identified by the researcher. The task in qualitative research is to convince the reader with

the conceivability of what is presented. Quotes, illustrations and field notes were utilized

to help the reader get close to the informants in this multiple case study. Finishing a case

study is a work of art. The case is interactive communication, first between a single

researcher with the case, and then later with the reader. Case study was selected for this

project because it is an exercise in such depth. This study was an opportunity to see

what others have not yet seen while reflecting upon the uniqueness of eight high school girls' lives. This study engaged and challenged the interpretive powers of the researcher. This study also helped continue to mold the researcher into an advocate for teacher development because of the respondents truthfulness during the interviews. Finally, this study further supported the need for the researcher to advocate for influential relationships between students and teachers.

The number of themes identified was different for each girl based upon her unique circumstances and voice. Each girl is introduced prior to their unique themes. The girls' themes were developed by their common ideas. The final themes are analyzed and discussed in the findings and conclusions. Ideas surfaced between the individual interviews, and are listed in Table 1 and 2. The cross case analysis themes developed from the ideas, shared by respondents are listed, and discussed in the findings and conclusions.

3.01 Table 1

Ideas Presented By Respondents

Encouragement, Friendship or Caring Words:

1. Some teachers believe in you.

2. Some teachers are friends.

3. Some teachers are nice.

4. Some teachers are trustworthy.

5. Some teachers inspire you.

6. Some teachers motivate you.

7. Some teachers care about you.

8. Some teachers help you.

9. Some teachers talk openly with you.

10. Some teachers are interested in you.

11. Some teachers are fun to be around.

12. Some teachers encourage you.

13. Some teachers listen to you.

14. Some teachers check in with you to see how you are doing.

15. Some teachers care about you.

16. Some teachers challenge thinking.

17. Some teachers provide incentives.

18. Some teachers respect you.

19. Some teachers are optimistic.

20. Some teachers are thoughtful.

21. Some teachers help you understand information.

22. Some teachers explain things when they teach.

23. Some teachers will offer you advice when you want it.

24. Some teachers give you attention when you want it.

25. Some teachers will not gossip about you with other teachers.

3.02 Table 2

Ideas Presented By Respondents

Hopeless or Reference to Superficial Words

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1. Some teachers do not know what they are teaching.

2. Some teachers do not change their teaching style.

3. Some teachers appear pointless in their teaching.

4. Some teachers ignore you in class.

5. Some teachers judge you.

6. Some teachers yell in class.

7. Some teachers are unwilling to listen to students.

8. Some teachers seem to throw out information so fast you can not understand what they are trying to teach.

9. Some teachers just seem to talk so much it just sounds like blah blah blah blah.

10. Some teachers are not trustworthy.

11. Some teachers are mean to kids.

12. Some teachers are prejudice.

13. Some teachers treat students differently.

14. Some teachers just do not care.

15. Some teachers tell your secrets.

16. Some teachers do the same routine daily.

17. Some teachers just lecture.

18. Some teachers never answer your questions.

19. Students are not priorities to some teachers.

20. Some teachers will not compromise.

21. Some teachers pick on kids.

22. Some teachers are always nagging.

23. Some teachers will not give you a fresh start.

24. Some teachers gossip about kids.

25. Some teachers keep their distance from you.