

CHAPTER 4: CASE FINDINGS

Case One: Molly

I think about all the teachers that helped [me] through, and helped me get the grade I did; it makes me think now, why am I doing all that hard work, and quit. it just makes me work harder, so that's how they (teachers) made a difference in my life.

Molly avoided eye contact with others and often looked away. There were also times when she would whip around and lash out as she recalled specific situations or people that had hurt her in some way. "The reason why I'm here (summer school), is throughout my Junior year I was sick second semester and they (school officials) said because I missed so many days that I had lost my credits and I had to make up my credits." Molly's school records documented 26 illnesses, 6 truancies, 9 medical and 6 parent requests for absences during the 1998-99 school year.

Molly appeared overly passionate when she told me during our first interview that she has been through "so much in her life time." Molly almost boasted when I asked about her grades, "Well to tell the truth, after what I've been through, I don't know how in the heck I got good grades." During the 1998-99 school year, on a five point scale Molly's first semester GPA was 1.26, while second semester increased to 2.12, with one incomplete, verifying her comments about why she was attending summer school. According to Molly's school records it was evident she was a very bright individual. Molly wrote in one of her journal entries that she felt "proud" when teachers told her she was doing well. Molly wrote, "They appreciate my hard work and determination." Seventeen year old Molly was guarded and secretive at times, as well as razor sharp in her anger toward specific individuals she talked about during her interviews. Molly was

intriguing, she was so secretive to most people about her personal affairs, but was willing to divulge those secrets to a researcher.

During our first interview on June 9, 1999, Molly snapped “all my friends abandoned me because of my life, even though I don’t share all the time with them, but they think I’m so dysfunctional and my boyfriend broke up with me because he thought that would make his parents happy and it messed me all up.” I got the impression that if I just sat, nodded my head and looked at Molly she could expel information for hours. When I asked Molly about her family she spewed forth:

When we lived together we were pretty wealthy. We had money and I was a spoiled girl, but now they are divorced. They got separated like eight times so we moved out. So we lived in a lot of houses. I’ve been to three different schools.

We had to go live with my mom’s best friend to get back on our feet, and that was terrible, I hated that even though she is the nicest lady. I don’t like her to this day because my mom can’t think for herself. She has to have people help her think. Most people don’t know our life. They think they do but they don’t, and they mess it up just because my mom can’t think for herself.

(quick breath)

My dad isn’t exactly the perfect human being, in and out of jail because of drinking and driving, [and] getting into accidents. He about killed himself.

I think it was a suicide attempt, and I was suppose to be with him that day.

He was drinkin [drinking] really really bad, and it was over by (town), and he took his truck in one ditch.

I thought about how Molly fit into the dynamics of her family and specifically her relationship with her father and mother. Her anger came forward when she spoke of her parents, feelings that appeared to be buried deep within her soul. I wondered if she allowed herself to confront her mother or father, or if she kept her hostile views hidden from them.

In contrast to her razor sharp words, Molly spoke adoringly more than once in our interviews of a male high school teacher that “couldn’t wait to get to school each day” and “he tells you how much he loves to teach.” It was almost like she admired his enthusiasm for teaching and life. Molly talked about going in to visit with this teacher after school asking about assignments, while including “it would be just an excuse to talk to him. He is just a super nice guy, and he is just a really good friend.”

During our second interview Molly shared more of her secrets when she reported:

When I was in school and missed so many days, they took me to (named a facility) to have a drug and alcohol evaluation, but that pissed me off. I mean they were judging me, see that’s how prejudiced they [school officials] get!

It was so stupid! I lied my whole way through it, I did. I’m not going to tell them how much I drink cause they would stick me in that place!

My dad has been in and out of alcohol treatment about eight times, and my mom about four, and I was in twice!

Molly’s anger erupted anytime she talked about the school officials or anyone else that attempted to invade her private world. Molly shared freely she had “already experimented with alcohol and figured out that that was my [her] scapegoat.” At one point during her second interview she mumbled something about the attitude of an

alcoholic that I didn't quite hear, so I asked her to repeat what she had just said, she arrogantly stated that. "the temperament of an alcoholic was not givin [giving] a rat about anybody!" It appeared to me that Molly was crying for attention, or maybe she was just trying to see what I would do with her information. I don't think Molly trusted me, she was testing me, probably to see if I was like the other school officials.

I believed Molly wanted me to like her and view her as a good student. She talked about how upset she got when other kids in her classes mess around just because the teacher is hard. Molly informed me. "If you didn't do any of the work you would fail, so it was really important to listen." Molly's approach to me was very complicated, she had different layers to her personality. She was either razor sharp with resentment or an outstandingly admirable student.

Molly talked about "when I see students being disrespectful to the teacher I get kind of mad." That statement made me wonder if Molly really thought highly of teachers, and that possibly school was the only place where she was noticed for her good abilities, while her challenge in school was to camouflage her deficits. I knew she hid her anger and outburst while in school because she didn't have any disciplinary incidents on her school record, and I wondered how long she would be able to mask her anger while in school.

Molly's Themes

After interviewing Molly, three themes emerged from her discussions about teachers. (a) Influential Teachers Believe In You, (b) Influential Teachers Are Friends and (c) Some Teachers Are Hopeless Because Of Their Unconcerned Attitude. Molly talked about two influential teachers she had encountered in her school career: a male math teacher and a male biology teacher, both from the high school. In one conversation

Molly stated she “doesn’t trust males”, so it was interesting when she spoke influentially of two male teachers. In reviewing Molly’s interviews she almost never talked favorably of female teachers, but yet indicated she would probably go to a female teacher for help and have no problem being honest with her. In comparison she indicated that she would not be as open or trusting with a male teacher.

When Molly reflected upon trust she stated, “Have I trusted some of my teachers, yea the thing that made me trust them is [was] that they actually put faith in me thinkin [thinking] that I was able to learn then. and they, um I actually wanted to learn.” It was apparent that Molly desperately needed teachers to believe in her. Thus, the first theme emerged as:

4.01 Influential Teachers Believe in You

Well, like what I said about Mr. (name), he actually believed that I could make it after missing so many days of school. When somebody believes in you, you know it’s all right, you know you go about as long as you try your hardest. They know when you give it your best shot.

By encouraging them he (teacher) actually wants them (students) to succeed. He um, he told me that I could do it when I was sick, and he told me that he’d help me through it; and that I was really smart, and actually I trusted him. And I did understand it. instead of going oh; ya [you] know, he made me trust him, and I could always talk to him about everything. I had a different math class but I would still go down there and talk to him (*laughs*).

Molly wrote in her journal:

When I’m encouraged, I feel like I am capable of actually succeeded [succeeding], and that people will help me out, to help me to [be] success[ful].

I feel proud when my teachers tell me I'm doing well, and they appreciate hard work and determination.

Websters New World Dictionary (1996) defines friend as a person who one knows well and is fond of, an ally, supporter or sympathizer. Molly chattered about her math teacher as a friend throughout the study. Therefore, the second theme emerged as something Molly seemed to crave since kindergarten:

4.02 Influential Teachers are Friends

As a kindergartner Molly's brother had been involved in an accident resulting in his severe brain trauma condition, which I viewed as greatly affecting Molly's ability to form friendship relationships during her school career. She spoke sadly of that time in her life. "I didn't have many friends at the time cause people were always judging me because of my handicapped brother, you know, so retarded and stuff."

When Molly talked about her math teacher from high school as influential her definition of a friend appeared one sided. She did not desire her teacher to share any information about his personal life or give her advice; she only wanted his attention. That teacher was someone to listen to her and provide only suggestions when they talked about her personal life. Molly verbally did not indicate that she would support or sympathize with anything that the teacher shared in their discussions. I did not believe that Molly would support anything from her math teacher that did not fit into her expectations or beliefs of a relationship. It would not have been appropriate for this teacher or any teacher to share personal issues with his student. So it makes sense when realizing Molly's friendship with her math teacher appeared one sided. Speaking from a feminist perspective, this relationship allowed Molly to be in control of her life decisions

and what she chose to divulge. Molly stated what “drew us close together” was the individual attention he provided her:

I started going out with my boyfriend. And he was teachin [teaching] him (boyfriend) in another class, and he would always give me heck about it; like, you’ll need to help him with his things. I guess that drew us close together to be good friends. He’s kinda [kind of] like my dad, cause my dad wasn’t there a lot of times. And he saw what was goin [going] on in school you know, and how distant I had become second semester when I lost my boyfriend and family, and everything started goin [going] down. I didn’t want to talk to no one and he, he pushed it out of me cause he was my friend. and he could do that, he was probably my friend.

Molly implied some uncertainty of her friendship with her math teacher when she stated “he was probably my friend”. This statement could show evidence of her willingness to leave room for disappointment in a friendship. Molly perceived she had experienced so many losses in her life, and disappointments in relationships with friends and family members.

Molly was not the only girl that associated one on one attention or help from a teacher within the context of an emotional feeling. It appeared important to Molly that teachers communicate individually with a student while in school when she stated:

When teachers actually sit down, and talk to you, and ask you if there is anything they can help you with. It really pushes your self esteem too, to really try hard cause they really wanta [want to] teach us.

When Molly talked about her biology teacher her relationship was different than what she experienced with her math teacher, yet still connected to a component of

friendship because it appeared she defended this teacher's teaching tactics, much like one would defend a close friend's actions. She told me:

People in that class, they know they are going to fail his class, so they just keep messing around you know, cause he was the hardest biology teacher they had. And if you didn't do any of your work you would fail. and so it was really important to listen. And he would go through the notes really fast. and if you were messin [messing] around. and didn't catch something he said then that meant you wouldn't get it, and miss somethin [something] on the test.

Additionally, Molly wrote in her journal:

When I see students being disrespectful to the teacher I get kind of mad. It is then that the teachers don't take their students seriously because of a few incidents. Those students who do disrespect are the ones that ruin [it] for the kids who do want to learn, and respect their teacher[s] for the [their] ability to teach.

Molly gained information, education and good grades from the relationship with her biology teacher. Molly was proud she achieved in this teacher's class especially since he was considered the hardest biology teacher. Being viewed as smart was important to Molly, and it appeared if you viewed her as intelligent she accepted you as her friend.

A relationship can be hopeless when one person in that relationship perceives it as such. Molly was cautious and listened closely to her teachers to form her opinions. What challenged Molly in her development of relationships was that she did not appear to change her decision once those opinions were formed. At one point she compared her math teacher with another teacher she did not like. "Well Mr. (name) would never talk about his family. You know, he'd just sit there and listen, and Mr. (name) he'd sit there

and would tell us how much he really didn't care, you know." Molly appeared to experience careless attitudes in her school and personal life environment, thus emerged her third theme:

4.03 Some Teachers Are Hopeless Because Of Their Unconcerned Attitude

According to Jean Baker Miller (1988), in the situation of failed or abusive relationships similar to Molly's life, "girls may find that they don't know who to trust, may be made to feel that they are nothing, and may learn that you really can't trust anybody," (McLean-Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, p. 154, 1995). During Molly's interviews she indicated some situations where she appeared powerless, which were hopeless in her eyes when she stated:

Well, most teachers keep their distance, you know, that's their work and they really don't care. Like my teacher, he told us that it was all right to fail, and my opinion it's not. I mean, that means he don't [doesn't] care, I guess. They've gotta [got to] want to teach us. They've gotta [got to] wanta [want to] be there to help us and not just be there cause [because it is] their job. I had a real big problem, in fact, this year. They (teachers) really didn't want to be there to teach. It's just a job! It is just their job to teach, give homework, and give the grade, they didn't care about the grades you got. If you're a different race, teachers look at you a different way. I know they do, and there are the teacher's pets. They (teachers) will help them more than they will help the whole class.

There was this Hispanic kid that went up to the teacher one time. And he, um, asked for help on makin [making] up his work. And I don't know the teacher just gave him a look like 'don't even bother' like you're not going to get far in

life. And you know the kid got the impression too, and he ended up throwing it (work) on the [teacher's] desk and just walked out of the room.

Molly also wrote in her journal; thoughts about being overlooked in class:

The worst thing about being a female student is being over looked and not heard.

Being treated differently in situations because of your sex.

A female student has a right to be treated equally, and not different. if she is not an athlete, cheerleader, popular or just because she's female. We have a right to be heard, but a lot of the time we aren't and are overlooked [in class].

When girls' upbringing exposes them to experiences where "no one ever listens and nobody cares about what they say or do they are at risk for healthy social, emotional, and intellectual development." (McLean-Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, p. 154, 1995).

Case Two: Carmen

He was cool, he could relate to kids. He'd talk to you every day. He'd talk to you about things that are going on. He'd ask you about stuff. I mean he was a fun teacher.

When I asked seventeen year old Carmen, "Are you a good student?" she casually replied with a touch of arrogance, "uh huh, can be, depends on if I'm trying or wanna [want to] try or not", "I'll be a good student if I like the teacher for one thing, if I didn't care, I get really stubborn". Carmen lacked enthusiasm. Her whatever attitude was prominent in her speech. During the 1998-99 school year Carmen was a junior with three detentions for failure to follow school rules, 32 truancies, 5 parent arranged absences, 7 illnesses and 2 substance abuse episodes on her school record. According to Carmen she was in summer school because she missed too many days, adding, "I didn't even think I

missed that many: I still don't understand it". Throughout the interviews Carmen was guarded and distant.

When I asked Carmen about school she flatly replied, "I just get bored with it (school), seems like a lot of stuff is the same over and over". Carmen was the most poised and distant of the girls I interviewed. Carmen was a very attractive girl that could have been a cover girl model. She played with her long, blond hair at times when she appeared to be pondering a question I had asked. Carmen was noticed when she entered the room: her long legs moved with a stride of confidence as she walked. Her demeanor smacked of arrogance the first time we met. I felt it was important when I interviewed Carmen that I be sympathetic, consistent and nonjudgmental in any way. She put up this wall of protection between us that I knew I had to get through if she was going to share anything of importance with me during this research project.

Carmen lived in a blended family with her father, stepmother and more than a half dozen children. She reported she had a 20 year-old-brother, a twin brother that "likes to party", and the "rest of the children" that "are 9, 11, 4 and 5 years old". When she talked about the younger siblings she just sort of lumped them together as "the rest of the children", and did not offer any specifics. I deduced that the siblings must be step-brothers and sisters. Carmen never gave them a name or a gender, and only mentioned them one more time when I asked if she had her journal to hand in to me at our last meeting. Carmen, in a matter-of-fact challenge informed that, "one of the kids took it; I don't know where it is."

Carmen appeared most comfortable during the first group video taping session compared to our one-on-one sessions. In some ways I think she was more confident because she had an audience. I did not feel like she had a lot of trust in me, while at the

same time she surprisingly reported, "I trust all of my teachers, usually when they're nice to you, if they don't give you a reason not to". In some minuscule way I felt she was warning me that she would trust me if I did not give her a reason not to trust me.

During our first group videotape Carmen reported, "a lot of teachers keep naggin [nagging] on you like 20 questions, I don't think its right you know". "I don't like it when they ask me personal questions; I think they're being nosy." Most of what she talked about during that videotaping session appeared to be negative towards teachers, unless someone disagreed with her about a specific teacher. In those situations Carmen never challenged. she just accepted what a peer said and appeared to listen to their rationale.

I was most surprised when she stated during our second and last video tape interview, "You learn absolutely nothin [nothing] from your best teachers." I couldn't help but wonder if she was angry because one of the summer school teachers had recently made a child abuse report concerning another member of our group, who didn't show up for this interview. Carmen seemed determined to make me understand during the second video interview that "a lot of things happen in High School that they (teachers) know nothing about." "Teachers don't know what goes on between kids." I never let on that I knew where any of the three missing members of our girls' group were, and pretended to be surprised and disappointed that they did not attend our last interview session.

Five months after I interviewed the girls I bumped into Carmen and she was very nice to me, like she was running into an old friend. She asked me if I had finished my research paper and also modestly asked, "Did we give you anything important for your research?" I was struck by her interest and told her that all of the girls gave me important ideas that I was continuing to work on, but wasn't finished with my dissertation yet.

According to one of my informants, Carmen graduated at the end of the 1999-2000 school year and immediately joined the Marines. One of my informants also reported that Carmen had stopped by the high school prior to the 2001 winter break. "She graduated #1 in her class at boot camp", and "was moving quickly through the ranks". "She has done quite well." "She is one of our successes", boasted the informant. It was difficult for me to imagine Carmen in the Marines. Taking orders and following rules did not make sense after knowing Carmen.

Carmen's Themes

Three themes were evident when reviewing Carmen's interviews, (a) Influential Teachers Are Nice. (b) You Can Trust Influential Teachers, and (c) You Have to Watch Out For Some Teachers. Because They Are Two Faced. Carmen's first theme did not emerge in my mind while we were interviewing, but rather the theme became more evident after reading through her transcripts a few times.

4.04 Influential Teachers Are Nice

Often while talking with Carmen she would end a statement with "I don't know", which was distracting and confusing because of her confident presence. Carmen appeared assertive and I believed she did know, but for some reason she was almost always noncommittal. McLean-Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan (1995) found in the Loral Study, that the phrase "I don't know peppered girls' language (in high school) marking the point where they either chose not to speak or began to lose the knowledge of feelings and desires they had known before (p.44)." Therefore, when Carmen frequently used "I don't know" my challenge as the researcher was to determine why.

Unraveling what Carmen would and would not reveal to me seemed to be evidence of her psychological and political strength as a female. The decision to withhold deep

personal opinions from me was a useful and suitable strategy of self-protection, which I think she maximized. I knew that Carmen did not trust me completely. I believe she was unsure if I would really keep her comments confidential.

Carmen shared several teachers she liked because they were nice, but none that I got the sense she viewed as influential. Some of her statements included:

[I liked] Algebra, with Mr. (name). I never wanted to miss that, cause it was hard to catch up if you did. plus he was a cool teacher, um. so I don't know. I like him. He explained stuff thoroughly, and very well, and he'd give us the whole class time. And give us problems, and he'd spend time going through it during class. And he'd talk about his experiences as a kid, and he'd relate to us. And understand stuff more. and he'd talk to us, like he was there. So he'd understand what we'd go through, and not just on a higher level. He was acting more like a kid. and it made us feel better too I think. he's got to be 50 somethin [something], he's cool!

The ability to "relate to kids", "help", "be nice", approachable and "explain stuff" were also evident in the other girls' interviews. Educators would agree that those qualities are important and relevant in teachers. Carmen also disclosed information about some of her teachers she liked by sharing:

He wasn't like a teacher. He'd like actually ask you questions about your life, and stuff. how you're doing and stuff. I don't know. he'd just talk to kids; and everyone gets along with him and stuff, pretty nice guy. I like my counselor. He's really nice.

Mrs. (name) (stopped in after school for help) my English teacher.

She was pretty good, and was a good teacher. She explained stuff, and go over it

with you. And um. Mrs. (name) she would; she was pretty good teacher. She was helpful a lot. And let me think who else, Mr. (name), I liked him he was my Algebra teacher.

I guess you have to like your teachers in order to want to go (to class). I'd go to class and stuff, but I didn't want to go to some classes, cause I didn't care for the teachers. They don't know how to relate to kids. They're (teachers) just there. it's part of a job.

Mr. (name) he was cool, he could relate to kids, he'd talk to you everyday. He'd talk to you about things that are going on. He'd talk to you everyday. He'd ask you about stuff. I mean he was a fun teacher.

Mr. (name) he was a Middle School teacher. I liked him a lot, but he was kind of, um. like he'd be really nice in class. Then when conferences came, he'd say things, like about other students. That wasn't right and you didn't understand. He was like my favorite teacher.

Carmen's second theme seemed important to her.

4.05 *You Can Trust Influential Teachers*

It appeared that trust was evidence as a precondition for developing any influential relationships with teachers. I did not sense that Carmen trusted any of her teachers. She spoke most often about the importance of trusting teachers, rather than having experienced trust with specific teachers. She linked the term trust with being nice.

Carmen listed:

There's [there are] teachers that know me when I get upset. And they say okay let's talk about it, and it works out (*did not provide specific names of teachers that know her*). I trusted all of my teachers usually when they're nice to

you. if they don't give you a reason not to like them. (*did not provide specific names of teachers that she trusted*) That's [That is a] pretty, um a hard question, more or less (clicking her pen).

To expect to have a good student you need to put trust on them, and they can trust you, to me. And don't go behind their back, an [and] say stuff about um [them] like to other teachers. And what I think, I think ya'd [you would] just have to know. You have said (refers to researcher), make students think that you (teachers) act like you (teachers) care about them (students) in school. Show them (students) that you (teachers) are going to be there, and help them and stuff.

Carmen spoke most about teachers within the context of disillusion or perceived injustice. Her third theme emerged early on during our interviews, and was verified in her transcripts.

4.06 You Have to Watch Out For Some Teachers Because They Are Two Faced
Carmen told me "teachers can be two faced" and "you can't just" automatically "trust them." Carmen arrived at this hypothesis based upon a variety of experiences that she identified below:

If you missed one little thing he gave you a 60. it was pointless. I don't understand that, cause you sat there, and did all the work. And you miss one thing, and you get a 60. And there are people that don't even do the notebook, and they get a 60, that doesn't make sense!

I think teachers expect us to come to school, be on time, do your work, get your homework done, and you'll be a great student. But if you do mess around, it's like watch out!

The thing about teachers is, if you're not a big jock, and you're not smart they get really, they don't care if you are there or not. I think they're [they are] real lenient on people that do sports.

I didn't like it cause you wouldn't learn anything you would just copy.

And oh we had packets too! It was just pointless stuff, and if you were there every day, he would like raise your grade a whole grade. You could miss up to four days, you know, it's like an easy class you don't learn anything, it's just a waste of time. They need to focus on students in school and not worry about how they come to school or what they do outside of school. anything like that!

Carmen was asked what kids did when they were in a class and did not learn anything.

She responded:

Some just went to other teachers to get help. She (teacher) was like a ditz she didn't know what she was doing half the time. Her husband right now is going through, they found cancer in his right lung, so she's been gone a lot. And when she wasn't there I did better with the sub. She (the teacher) was really nice you know usually there is a couple of us that usually start yellin [yelling] out, that's not what you told us before, usually it was there in front of the whole class. So, everybody listens for stuff like that, so they can catch (the teacher) on it.

They (students) listen for their (teachers) faults, maybe that's what the teachers do too, I don't know.

Carmen was asked how she can tell when the teacher treats her differently, and reported:

You can tell by their (teachers) actions, if they're (teachers) just not super nice to you, or if they (other students) do the same work or you (Carmen) are doin

[doing] the same stuff as others (students) and you're (Carmen) gettin [getting] worse grades than them (other students), just grading different, or you ask them (teachers) questions and they don't answer you (Carmen), but they answer others (students). stuff like that.

Later. Carmen talked about how teachers should teach students, by reporting:

[A good teacher] explains stuff better, ask us if we understand. [and] just don't throw it at us. [They] help us to understand it. Don't get upset and don't throw it at us. go back over it. And doesn't rush to get us to do your assignments in class we can do them outside of class. as long as we understand them.

Carmen talked about a female chemistry teacher she recognized as treating her differently in comparison to the other students. Her statements provided evidence of what guided Carmen away from developing an influential relationship with this specific teacher. According to Carmen:

It (teacher's attitude and treatment toward Carmen) like totally made you feel uncomfortable , especially in class. I thought she was kind of weird towards me. She would always like graded [grade] me different. She didn't like; ah like if I'd ask her somethun [something] she wouldn't respond to me the same as she did with the other kids. The Chemistry teacher, she just doesn't know what's going on. Half the time she'll tell you one thing, then she'll go and tell you a totally different thing. She'd like stare at me when I'd walk through, like she was looking at what I was wearing and stuff. does that make sense? She makes it out like I'm totally doing everything wrong, and I should've done better than that. She picks out her favorites in class, and like helps them out, and gives them answers; but then, people she doesn't care for she won't

even acknowledge. I think a lot of it is if I don't like the teacher, then I don't do so good. That's how it was in chemistry. I just didn't like the teacher, so I just didn't do it. A lot of it has to do with the teacher, if they like us (students) then the students are going to do better.

This chemistry teacher is someone Carmen will probably always remember as having a negative impact on her perception of teachers. She is cautious of teachers and relays that you "can't just come out and trust a teacher that is mean to you. I think teachers put out a lot of. I don't know how to say it, they label you." Carmen continued to voice that "they (teachers) need to get to know the students a little bit better. And I don't know, like not focus on what they're wearing; but like what's inside more. I don't know." Carmen generalized her experience with this one female teacher to all female teachers when she stated:

I think a lot of female teachers are like jealous of the students. Like if one's pretty, or like, one then they won't like them as well, like visa versa kinda [kind of] girls. They are not as cleaned up, girls. They won't help them either. I think it all depends on looks, and actions. and everything. And what they do, and a lot of teacher[s] are just different.

Case Three: Sonia

If they (teachers) shy away from you, then you just cower in the corner.

Seventeen year old Sonia was a gothic philosopher with a passion for Shakespeare. Her thinking was methodical and usually delivered in a deliberate fashion. She had a flair for the creative aspects of life, but didn't display a gentle creative aura. Sonia had eyes that looked at you with her determined savoir-faire. She often had her mouth open, ready to respond while listening intently, soaking in the details from her

surroundings. Sonia told me that she was currently restoring a vintage car and was completing the bodywork herself. I could picture Sonia working on cars with grease on her clothes and under her nails. Sonia did not have a warm and caring disposition; she had a rough demeanor, but I suspicion that she was secretly very sensitive, especially how others perceived her.

Sonia's school records indicated that during the 1998-99 school year she had 6 incidents of substance abuse, 4 illnesses, 7 truancies and 2 parent requests. She was in summer school because she had not completed the requirements for English. I asked her about her grades and she proudly retorted "(my) grades aren't very good, 3's", because she does not "put forth the effort". Sonia's grades on a five point scale during the 1998-99 school year were 3.08, first semester and 3.91, second semester.

Sonia played in the high school marching band during the previous few years, but when I asked her to tell me about that experience she reported she was going to drop it (marching band), because "they (other students) play better, march better, are better, get better grades", so she wouldn't miss it. As I came to know Sonia she expressed harshness both verbally and in her journal writing. One of her journal entries stated:

They (teachers) have dominated my life for 13 years; they have had the most influence on me, more than my parents. I have spent 8 hrs [hours] a day, 5 days a wk [week] for 13 years with them. The people I am refering [referring] to is [are] teachers. Everyone tells me that they are suposed [suppose] to teach me, is [is it] that I am not good enough to take up their time[?] To me, it seems as if they think I am a waste of human life, and a waste of time. There have only been a few who have actually taught me anything, and most of what they have taught me is about life, instead of the subject at hand. They have

taught me how to be open minded, how to accept others, and be more creative.

The others have taught me nothing except how to accept rejection and disappointment [disappointment]. None of them care about me, or the class they teach. They don't want to be there, just like I don't want to be there. I have gotten to the point where I don't care anymore. I used to care about my grades, my classes, and even my teachers. Now it seems that my teachers and I have come to a mutual agreement to hate each other and annoy [annoy] each other as much as possible. It never used to be like this. I used to be happy at school, now I am delighted to get away. I'm not sure what ever happened, but something has dramatically [dramatically] changed the way I look at that place called school.

At times Sonia surprised me in her verbal responses, since her conduct was more somber and jaded. During her second interview Sonia said;

My art teacher, he really inspired me to do well. He encouraged me to do different things through my artwork. And he also started me thinking, and because of him I think I started to write things down. And express some of that (thoughts) through my art work, which is really a neat combination between English, and art expression, and getting your point across.

I provided all of the girls with a journal, and sketchbook for them to draw illustrations of any experiences they wanted to share with me during the research study. After discovering Sonia was artistic during her second interview, I was really looking forward to the drawings she might create in her sketchbook. When I collected the journals and sketches from the girls, Sonia told me she didn't spend any time drawing in her sketch book, and tried to hand it back to me. I told her to keep the sketch book since

I gave it to her. I was disappointed that Sonia didn't draw in her book, but I wondered if she was too afraid that I might be critical, or that she didn't view her drawings as good enough.

Sonia's Themes

Sonia's statements evolved into two different themes. (a) Influential Teachers Inspire Students. and (b) Some Teachers Think You Are a Waste Of Human Life. Sonia spoke of three influential teachers she had encountered in her school career: a male English teacher, a male art teacher and a female German teacher, all from high school. Sonia talked excitably of these three teachers creating her first theme.

4.07 influential Teachers Inspire Students

He was just really cool. I bought him a "A Hitchhikers Guide Book to the Galaxy": and in fact just last week he came into where I work. and he asked me if I had been listening to "Hitchhiking Around the Galaxy." And I said no, I really hadn't, and he told me he has been listening to them on tape. And he really enjoys them (books). I think it's really neat when a student can inspire a teacher. I think that's really neat people can do that, but a lot of teachers don't allow themselves to be seen by their students outside of school; which is kind of close minded, and set in their ways.

In contrast to Sonia's English teacher, her art teacher inspired her to develop creatively when she stated:

My ninth grade Art teacher, he was just an amazing person, and real energetic about everything. And it was more independent; do your own work type of thing. It was just that he would sorta [sort of] give you the

basis for what you were to do for your Project. And you were allowed to make decisions how to do it.

(during the second interview Sonia talked again about the Art teacher)

My Art teacher that I already talked about, he really inspired me to do well. He encouraged me to do different things through my artwork.

Sonia's experience with her male English and male art teacher exposed her to traditionally different stereotypes. Feminist theorists argue that gender is a social construction, which means that it is not inherent to individuals, but created through interactions (Rider, 2000, p. 87). With these two nontraditional teachers Sonia was provided with opportunities to encounter non stereotypical experiences:

I think basically with teachers it doesn't matter the gender. It just matters how you treat the students, and the relationships between the students and yourself. How you act with students, it's not a gender thing, I don't think.

Sonia's appreciation of her female German teacher was shared within a relational context, which was stereotypical. Some research evidence suggests that "women are more likely than men to initiate hugs and embraces, particularly with people they know." Consistent with this research, Major (1981) found that touching is associated with warmth and affection, particularly for women (Rider, 2000, p. 183). Sonia's description of her German teacher being "real nice, more of a warmth" is unique, but not surprising when she stated in an interview:

My German teacher believes in everybody. She's just real out going; its just really hard to explain. Its just the way she teaches, the way she acts around the students, the way she wants to be around the students even outside of class. The way she set up the German Club group, and tried to get

everybody together. And (she) tried to get us to believe and trust in each other and ourselves.

Sonia spoke more generally when she expressed her opinions about preconditions for developing influential relationships with teachers:

A lot of teachers now encourage me. They try and decide what I should do when I grow up. Students too, try, and encourage me. try and decide a career I should go in to. And ah, and really I think that is a lot of what teachers do even kindergarten on. They're just there to help you do the education and then help you decide what you want to go in to.

I think it's pretty important to trust your teachers' cause of some things like essays. Its got to be the truth, and if you don't trust your teacher you're just going to lie through the entire thing. Things like that, you have to be able to trust your teachers.

I think believing in someone has a lot to do with trust because if you don't trust someone you're not going to believe what they say. You're not going to trust them with anything, basically I believe that belief in someone and trust are synonymous. They pretty much have the same meaning.

I think a lot of it is pretty automatic, cause if you don't trust your teacher at least a little bit, it's like sudden death. You know, cause otherwise it's not a good relationship between you and your teacher, between you and your class, you and your school. Basically, just, I don't know, um just be there cause sometimes you see that some people get better treatment than others. The best advice I would give a teacher is to be fair to everybody.

Sonia's second theme weaved through her four interviews.

4.08 *Some Teachers Think You Are A Waste Of Human Life*

Similar to the other girls, Sonia talked about cautiously watching and closely listening to teachers. All of the girls seemed cognizant of how they interacted with their teachers as well as how their teachers interacted with other students. Their opinions of their teachers were formed based upon these observations. Sonia told of her observed experiences emotionally:

Right before the semester test our teacher passed out little slips that had everybody's grade on it, and I happen to see this person's little slip. Later on during the class period he called the basketball player up to his desk, and said if you pass the semester test then you'll pass the class. I didn't like that too much. I thought that was incredibly unfair and wrong! He would lecture the whole time, and you would take it home for homework. And none of the examples matched what he did in class, and you didn't have time to go up, and ask him cause [because] it was due the next day. He was like a drill sergeant that was demanding that we do the homework rather than assigning it. It was really exhausting cause [because] he would give us this homework and I didn't do it cause [because] nothing matched the examples. I dreaded the class every day cause [because] I know [knew] it was going to be the same thing every day. A lot of people felt the way I did. In fact I think the majority of people felt like I did, but they did what I did, I have to do this I have no other choice so it must be done, so there's nothing else you can do, just get through it. I was intimidated by him, he was scary, he taught his class like it was the military, it was so set out, flat set out, do it this

way or get out! I ended up not doing very well in that class, and ended up taking it over with a different teacher and I got an A in the class. She went a lot slower, cause [because] the first teacher just went so fast. My 9th grade Algebra teacher he was one that would use the worksheets, and if you needed help he might help ya [you], and he might not help ya [you] He went into depth detail, 400 examples and by the end of class you were just lookin [looking] like what did you (he) just do?

Case Four: Ginah

“She liked the people that everyone picked on, and I was one of the people that picked on everybody, so she didn’t like me (giggles)”

Ginah, a petite seventeen-year-old red head, gloated the first time we met that she had “always been the shortest person in her class.” She voiced her opinions with a wide eyed innocence combined with an is-that-enough-of-an-answer disposition. She talked about playing softball and soccer, and stipulated that she probably wouldn’t receive any scholarships because of her academic status. She divulged to me that when she did not understand her schoolwork, she just took it home and either her father or mother explained it, or helped her rather than asking the teacher. Additionally, she did not seem concerned or embarrassed at all when she told me sometimes her parents even do her homework. I asked Ginah what her GPA was and she replied, “I think it’s a 3.2 or something like that (yawning), I’m not sure.”

Ginah, just completed her junior year at a Catholic high school. During the research project she never appeared to connect or interact with the other girls. She only talked when she was directly asked a question during the group interviews, and she rarely volunteered information during her individual interview. As I got to know Ginah, she did

not have much in common with the other girls in the research group. She appeared to attend school daily and follow school rules, unlike the other girls. Ginah was in summer school only because “my Grandpa died” and “we were gone a lot and I didn’t make up my (English) homework.”

Everything Ginah shared was in a matter-of-fact way. She was neither heated nor thrilled about any topic or comments that she made to me. During a one-on-one interview she talked at great length about students from her school that had different tongue or facial piercing. At one point she talked specifically about one of her friends that transferred to a public high school because of her (friend’s) eyebrow pierce. Her Catholic high school required that you place a band aide over any eyebrow piercing. Ginah chattered on and on questioning her friend’s decision to move to a public high school because she wouldn’t wear a band aide over her eye brow. Ginah appeared perplexed when she shared a conversation she recently had with one of her friends:

Well. (I said) why don’t you just take it out and put a band aide over it,

cause [because] they’ll (the school) let you wear it if you have a band aid over it.

Ginah ended our conversation on this topic with her opinion:

So, I don’t see why they (students) just don’t just do that. (Friend) says it expresses herself. and she doesn’t want to hide herself under a band aid or something like that. It’s like okay whatever you say, it’s sure odd.

Ginah appeared to be lazy in school, and was probably an average student that got by. When I asked her who she thought about when I had came to summer school and asked for volunteers for my study; Ginah said she thought about all the teachers she didn’t like, “I was thinking I didn’t like her and I didn’t like her, there was one teacher I liked, oh a couple of them (teachers), I like the guy teachers”. Ginah also appeared more

naive than the other girls in the study. When she talked, words just sort of shot out of her mouth without any censorship, which was very unlike the other girls in the group.

Recently, it was shocking to read in the local newspaper that Ginah, now 20 years old was “charged with possession of methamphetamine for a June 14, 2002 incident” exactly two years after beginning this study. I couldn’t comprehend how her life journey delivered her to the point of drug possession especially remembering when she talked about wanting to be a police officer? According to high school and local law enforcement officials, in this community methamphetamines have been the drugs of choice for many adolescents. It was disappointing that Ginah, currently a young adult was using drugs, especially since she appeared so naive about life just a few short years ago.

Ginah’s Themes

Ginah never spoke of any influential relationships with teachers, rather she spoke of different things she liked or experienced in her school career. Two themes emerged from Ginah’s interviews, (a) Influential Teachers Are Not Like A Teacher, They Are Like A Friend and (b) Some Teachers Have Favorites, And I’m Not One Of Them. Ginah’s responses lack depth during her interviews. In revealing her first theme, Ginah talked of some teachers she liked because she knew them as a neighbor.

4.09 Influential Teachers Are Not Like A Teacher, They Are Like A Friend

She viewed these teachers as personable, advocates for kids, fun, or friends. Ginah rattled through her educational career in chronological order when she recited teachers she liked:

I liked my second grade teacher, she was more like a friend too! She was really young, and she was really nice to us. And she had braces all the time, so I liked her.

Mrs. (name), she put this big blow up planetarium thing in our room, and [we] moved all the desks, and we had class in this big planetarium thing, under the stars. I thought that was really cool. That's why everybody likes her, she does that every year.

(skipped middle school teachers)

She let us take our cars one time, which was really cool cause most teachers wouldn't trust us that much to take your own car up there. And she trusts ya [you], so I think that's cool. Nobody does anything wrong in our class, nobody mouths off to her, cause she trust[s] you, so I guess they give her more respect then they do other teachers.

Mrs. (name) I like a lot, her little boy is in my little sister's grade, and so they car pool together and stuff, so it's more like, it's more like, I call her by her first name. Yeah, she's like the only one I really liked. I think it's more cause I know her too, because I baby-sat her kids and stuff too; she lives right behind me. (names some male coaches) Yea, but I don't know, they all seem more young, more like your friend, more personable than a teacher.

(returns to female teachers)

So, it's more like we're friends, so I think that's why I like her, and that she always let us sit there, and watch movies and eat food.

I liked my Spanish teacher, I liked her, but I didn't like the class. She was close; she was like a teenager. She always told the principal what was wrong, and stuff like that. That's why we liked her, cause she stood up for the kids, instead of standing up for the other teachers, when she knew the teachers

were wrong. That's why we like her. If you needed something to talk about, you could always go in there, and talk, like a friend.

Ginah was asked to explain, what teachers came to her mind immediately when the girls attending summer school were offered an opportunity to participate in this study. She flippantly shared that she immediately "thought of all the teachers she didn't like." Ginah did appear to focus upon the teachers she disliked more often than those she liked throughout the study. Ginah's second theme resulted from her comments about teachers she disliked.

4.10 Some Teachers Have Favorites, And I'm Not One Of Them

Most of Ginah's rationale for not liking specific teachers never appeared to develop from an in-depth discovery, but rather flippant comments such as:

I didn't like any of the women teachers, really!

(mentions teacher) She always got mad at you for chewing gum, that's the only reason I didn't like her.

(mentions another teacher) I don't know why she cares about our family.

And it was like, I don't want to tell you about my family, you have your own!

My Algebra teacher, my Geometry teacher I didn't like them either.

I don't know why, they all seem to think that their class is the only class that you have to take.

At one point Ginah did attempt to give a detailed account of one of her teachers she did not like. She described this teacher's favored treatment of some students as a rationale for her dislike when she reported:

Ah, she's really edgy; she's really like on edge all the time. And she's got her favorites, so if you're not one of her favorites, it's like *(raises voice tone)*

'Be quiet, sit down, err', But if she's your favorite, you know, like (names a boy) was her favorite. and he could get up and like run around the room. And he'd go and sit down. and she wouldn't say anything to him. And then, you know, someone she doesn't like gets up to throw away a piece of paper; she's like (raises voice tone) 'sit back down, I didn't tell you to get up', and we're like o-kayyyyy!

Case Five: Rachele

I wasn't you know, the slacker. After school if I added them all up, it was millions and millions of hours after school, which is not detention (laughs). it's just help.

Rachele emerged as more of a confident young lady, in comparison to the other girls. She viewed herself as a mature soul. Rachele, was a student in-between a sophomore and junior status who described herself as the "kind of person that just, go(es) on and get(s) it done". Rachele was the most passionate of the girls. She had experienced something in school that the other girls had not. She reported she was "in summer school because in 10th grade on the 5th day of school I had a confrontation with a girl in the hall resulting in a fight" I asked for more information concerning "a fight". Rachele said she stabbed a girl who had threatened her over the phone. Rachele stabbed the girl with a protractor, after this girl started to bother her in the hall on the way to math class. As a result, Rachele was released from school for a calendar year.

At 15, she was placed on probation during the school year she was released. Rachele referred to her probation officer as a "guardian angel", because she recommended to the judge that Rachele be released from probation early. According to Rachele, she "regrets her behavior", but "learned a lot" from the experience.

In comparison to the other girls in the research group Rachele was the most supportive of teachers and education. In one of her journal entries she wrote:

The most important relationship[s] that I hold in high school are my friends for support, my family for emotional stability, (and) teachers for understanding what I'm suppose to learn sitting in school

Rachele also wrote "if I have a good relationship with my teachers, I feel comfortable asking for help, and it helps me get along better in school." She relayed going in after school while in elementary school pretending that she needed help, just to spend extra time with the teacher. She talked about a time when another elementary teacher asked her to give a speech at her sixth grade graduation. Rachele stated that "this teacher honored me" by asking her to give a speech.

Rachele was in summer school because she wanted to stay with her class. Summer school allowed her to gain some additional credits because, according to Rachele, she "can't stand being a year behind them (peers)". By attending summer school she would be able to stay with her class and graduate on time. Rachele said she wanted:

To work really hard to get this (high school) through, and over with, um that was like a major point in my life. It (exclusion from school) changed my outlook on life on everything. I used to look down on things, and now I look up.

When Rachele was excluded from school, she took correspondence classes though a state university. She completed a geometry, history and English course that year. Rachele paid for the classes with her own money and talked proudly of her accomplishment.

It's hard to teach yourself a class cause [because] you look at books, and you have the answer book right next to you, and it's like hummmmmmm. I want to use this

so bad but I can't cause I won't get anything, and [at] test time you're really stuck, and it was hard, but I did it and it's like awesome. I didn't slack off and do absolutely nothing.

According to school records, Rachele's GPA during 1998-99 was 2.2 first semester and 2.28 second semester. Rachele was a very capable student and if she continued her strong drive to complete high school with her class she probably would graduate on time.

Rachele didn't show up during our last group videotaping. According to one of the summer school teachers she walked out of school after the police and a Health and Human Service worker showed up a few days earlier to talk with her about some bruises she had on her arms and legs. This same teacher said that in the past, Rachele's high school aged brother physically abused her, and she assumed that was what probably happened this time, too. Later, I contacted Rachele at her home and asked if she would turn in her journal and drawings. A few weeks after Rachele was contacted both she and Molly turned in their journals together: apparently they had become friends during summer school and were just "hangin [hanging] out together."

As it turns out, Rachele graduated a semester earlier than her class and immediately entered the community college. In June 2002, I checked with one of my informants concerning Rachele's school success. She is currently taking nursing classes. According to an informant, Rachele is the "best student in the LPN nursing program." The informant also thought that Rachele had made the decision to switch to a university and work towards her RN degree. This is quite an accomplishment, considering Rachele told me during the research study that the "people in her family didn't go to college."

Rachele's Themes

Five themes emerged from Rachele, (a) Influential Teachers Give You Encouragement Galore, (b) I'm Willing To Show Influential Teachers Respect, (c) I'll Trust Influential Teachers With More Than School Work, (d) Some Teachers Treat Students Differently According To Gender, and (e) I Feel Like A Bother to Some Teachers. Rachele's experience of having been excluded from school for one calendar year provided her with some different opportunities, perspectives, and challenges that the other girls never experienced. Rachele had a more mature attitude toward school compared to the other girls.

She talked about four elementary teachers, a third-period high school teacher, and high school principal who influenced her school career in an inspiring way, thus the progression of her first theme.

4.11 Influential Teachers Give You Encouragement Galore.

She proudly discussed memories during her three interviews about:

(second grade teacher) I'd get so frustrated cause [because] I can not write cursive letters, and she would sit there everyday to make sure I got it. I always made it too small, but she sat with me and made sure I got it, and it was embarrassing, but I got it!

My 4th grade teacher; my parents were divorced, and I talked to her about it. You know two words, or just the extra sentence that just helped me out during the day. She knew what was going on in my life, and I think it is good

that you can trust your teachers. And she was there for me, and cause [because] she knew my family history so it was really nice.

(fifth grade teacher) She'd do the extra things, like you know, come to you even if you don't have your hand raised. She'd say 'how ya [you] doing, are you getting through this, do you understand it'?

After school we had a group of about 15 people that she would help after school. With her we just wrote some problems after school on the board. I would know how to do it, but I would like to just sit in there with her. It was just interesting and she would make things so fun! *(fifth grade)*

My sixth grade teacher, she honored me. *(asked Rachele to deliver a speech during sixth grade recognition)* And she was sittin [sitting] in the front row, and she just could tell I was so nervous.

And she'd after every sentence, she'd clap, and it made you laugh. And it sorta [sort of] made your speech a lot better, and easier you know; to have someone sittin [sitting] there, and encouraging you so much. I thought she was a really great teacher.

(no middle school teachers were mentioned)

My third period teacher this last year she believed in everybody. She knew we all could do it, and that was an easy class. She still, you know; people have problems in every class, to me it's easy, but to others it's hard. um, She would [say] 'oh you can do it' *(says in a pleasant voice)* oh you can get this done, if I give you all this work, oh you can get this done, you can do it, trust me you can do it. Time is not a matter with her, she's just you know, whenever you get it done that's fine with me as long

as you show you're working on it. She believed in me, she believed in all of us.

You could tell she loved us. She loved being there for us, and she is another positive influence. And she tells me all the time; 'before you leave this school. before you leave this town to go to college you better come tell me how it's going.' I think that is one person I'll probably keep in contact with cause [because] she is amazing, amazing teacher and person. She was a perfect example of a teacher! (*third period teacher*)

My principal. He knew I could do it as well as I did. It helped of [for] him to give you the extra push. He (*principal*) tells me everyday, you'll get your diploma. Just keep picturing that in your mind, if you think you can't do it or won't do it, it will just erase out of your mind.

Rachele spoke firmly about the importance for teachers "to know them (*students*) really well and to put all your [their], I don't know the word, (*hesitates*) confidence in them, that's believing in someone". Rachele easily provided little examples of her own experiences and opinions of encouragement from teachers. She shared:

I noticed I was skipping that class a lot. And I noticed my teacher, Mrs.(*name*), she tried so hard to get me; you know motivated. And I wasn't. And then, like at the end of the year in order to boost my grade up from a 4 to a 3, I went and ran the mile on the last day of school. And I got my report card last week, and on there it said, shows good effort, and good contribution to class. And before that, my report card was, missed too much, showed too many absences. If they (*students*) show a little effort, you know, cause maybe that teacher did too!

I think that most of them (*teachers*) enjoy it; that a student cares enough to come in afterwards. to ask for anything they need.

(*teachers should*) Show enthusiasm, show some excitement in what you can do. Telling them you can do it. and you have the power to do it, that's encouragement, or maybe, it's you know, some teachers [should] bribe students (*with incentives*)

Like my teacher this year he would constantly, it kinda [kind of] got on your nerves cause [because] he would walk around so much. but he would. And he'd come and ask ya [you], how your [are you] doing?

'Oh you can do it' (*one teacher said*), he was a hard teacher, [and] he didn't make it easy in any sort of way. He wanted you to learn, not him to learn for you. And so. that's where he got off saying, 'you can do it, YOU!' So that's another teacher that believed in me. When other people believe in you, it's the greatest feeling!

Rachele's second theme emerged when she spoke about what female students perceive as preconditions for developing influential relationships with teachers.

4.12 *I'm Willing To Show Influential Teachers Respect*

If a student is being bullied, I help them out. But, if a teacher is saying something, and we're not being quiet, I tell them (*students*), 'be quiet listen to what she has to say or he has to say.' You know, we're on their time, you know, we're not on our time.

I think it's good for students, if the teacher shows you respect, show them respect as well. Teachers that just put out extra effort constantly, and show that they care. I think deserve you know, from students more respect. You know that

makes me want to be more respectful to a teacher, cause [because] he or she [is] not getting that extra respect from that student, so I'll show more for respect for the teacher. And you know, ask the right questions, and make um [them] feel like, you know you're not just up there blabbing on. You're up there cause [because] I want to learn, so I show teachers [more respect].

Rachele's third theme *I'll Trust Influential Teachers With More Than School Work*, seemed evident only after going through her video and interviews more than once. According to Carol Gilligan (1991), "adolescence seems to be a watershed in female development, a time when girls are in danger of drowning or disappearing". "Problems in girls' adolescent development are problems of connection rather than problems of separation as psychologist traditionally assumed" (p.34-35). Rachele appeared at a critical stage in her adolescent life, having just returned to school after a year of being excluded, as well as having experienced the abuse she experienced at home. I questioned if Rachele was truly voicing what was reality or rather what she wanted to portray for the researcher, when her third theme emerged.

4.13 *I'll Trust Influential Teachers With More Than School Work*

I trusted a lot of my teachers with not just my school work (*sounds tired*), my grades, but also my personal life, it's really nice to have, so yea, I trusted. Some teachers that know my family, they know what is goin [going] on, and I trust them to not tell. But mainly, some of my other teachers I trust them with just my school work. because if they; I think that some teachers, certain ones if they know too much about you, then they use it to your disadvantage, or your advantage in the classroom.

To believe in someone is to trust them, to um, to do their best, to watch them

succeed, to believe that they can do it. I think, if I had a better relationship with all my teachers, I wouldn't have this I think, um, I don't want to study attitude.

I don't want to do my homework tonight attitude, I think if I'm friends with a teacher as well as a student to a teacher, then you know 'oh geese she'd expecting me to get his done tomorrow. I'm not going to put it off. I'm going to stick to it, but if it's a teacher I have problems with, you know, it's a class that basically you know that the teacher don't [doesn't] show encouragement then, I'll you know, go off with my friends. and do that later, but if it's [I'm on] a friendly basis (with the teacher) then I'll stick to that and not steer off the course or subject.

My teachers, they gave me the attitude towards things, cause [because] my family, my family's not the type to go to college. My brother and my sister went, but my brother dropped out. and he only had a year left. I want to be the first to graduate from college.

My family, we don't really talk about things, so at school I can talk about things. There are things that I can't talk to my mom about, and then your teachers give you this attitude; I learn from them. It's basically my teachers that tell[s] me, they gave me this, might as well get up and try attitude. I think it's better learning from the teachers anyway, cause they want you to succeed.

(describes a teacher)

Students were acting up, [and] she would look at it as a way to change a positive way, not a negative way. [She would] like, sit down and talk to you. She was really calm and receptive to the kids. She didn't want to push us away from her, you know, she was listening better to fix the problems, and she was really nice.

I think it should just be natural to a teacher to do that. Teachers don't have, some teachers don't have patience

If you can talk to them, and they can listen, willing to listen to you. And I like teachers who take time out to ask you how you are.

(describes another teacher)

Another good quality to have is not just class teaching, but the life teachings.

We'd get in a circle once every three weeks, and she would ask us if anything was bothering us. Totally confidential, it wouldn't leave this room. and everyone just felt her openness, and just talked about things, anything. We had subjects ranging from people's experiences with drugs, how to um, basically abusive relationships. It was just how she could make these people feel so comfortable, so open. I told her that maybe at the beginning of class I didn't like it, but everything you say, I do listen to and think about. She was just smiling 'thank you' she was a cheery person: smiling and she'd extend it and make it so exciting to all of us. She'd say it with such enthusiasm, and we'd look at her, and go 'geeze this lady drank too much coffee, but it was just really nice how somebody was so enthusiastic about being up there to teach.

I think they should be open minded *(to different types of people)*

Caring is another thing, and if they're caring, and they're there, then obviously they care about teaching. And they care about students.

That is a really important quality for teachers to have.

Another important quality would be their teaching ability. You know, they should, they can try to teach to the class, not teach for themselves.

Not just sit up there, and talk about things, cause that's what they like to learn about things.

(mentions one teacher) She made class fun, she was a riot!

(teachers should be) Saying hi outside of class. If they talk to you showing their openness, you know, hear what you have to say. As long as I think they are willing to listen to anything you gotta [have to] say [I'd] probably be able to trust them.

I feel I am at a mature stage. I can talk to them about certain things, besides the course of study. I think it is really cool to do that.

Rachele's fourth theme appeared more prominent and in-depth in comparison to the other girls. Most of what Rachele provided was insightful information could be confirmed as important feminist issues in research by Gilligan (1990), Sadker and Sadker (1994) and Sullivan (1997).

4.14 *Some Teachers Treat Students Differently, According To Gender*

Female teachers seem to me, to be more productive with students,

(when comparing male and female teachers) as my male teachers have been.

(identified a teacher)

He would admit to us he liked male students better, and I told you last week, like in a jokenly [jokingly] way, but it wasn't to us *(girls)*. It would seem our guy friends' attitudes would change when they would walk into his classroom.

We *(girls)* have a brain too, we can use it! In his classroom, males sit on one side and females sitting [sit] on the other side.

(asked how many teachers in your life supported you or encouraged you)

Probably about eight, and the weird thing about that is they're all female,

except for the principal at Senior High you know

Female teachers are, well let's get it done. [They ask] but what did you learn from it. They ask the extra questions that matter, make you think, not just the basic stuff. Male teachers are, get in, get out, [and] let's get this over with! My male teachers aren't as, you know, open about things, you know. I seem to have more problems with male teachers. They seemed superior to us then, all the girls felt that, we always talked about that. It was just the feeling in the classroom, wasn't as great a feeling as in my other classrooms.

He was a joke kind of guy. He was funny, and I think teachers were attracted to that. He has a nice personality and everything. I just didn't think he treated us, his class in general. It was obvious to us (*girls*), it was not to everybody else, but it was to us. He was a favorite of other teachers, cause he was talkin [talking] to them. And he was up there talkin [talking] to other teachers, and the principal and him, oh would sit at a lunch table and eat together. We knew he was joking, but we didn't know cause he's a teacher, and unless he really did care more about guys than he did about us, why would he say it out loud.

Females show a lot more than males do, show a lot more respect than male teachers do for students. The female teachers are more emotional, and they are more sensitive to students needs, than males are.

I like the fact that they're like that. I had that with all my female teachers.

I can't remember one that wouldn't do the extra push for me.

(*talks about another male teacher*) Us girls would never raise our hand, cause [because] if you didn't know about baseball or basketball; those would be the questions he would ask. If you wanted to write on the board, or do some extra

activities up in the front of the room, he would put these question[s] out like, who was the best baseball player, and I'm sitting here going I have no idea!

Favorites, we do notice, students do notice a lot about what teachers do. And I think it is important that if everyone is treated equally, then the bad things will go away, and the good things will come out. And teachers will have a lot easier time with students in general, if they just treat them equally.

The fifth and final theme that emerged was a result of Rachele speaking from her heart of some painful experiences she had endured in school. The final theme stabs at my very soul of what I believe students should not encounter in school.

4.15 *I Feel Like a Bother To Some Teachers*

I know in some of my classes that I was an A class student, but cause [because] of the environment I was in. I didn't try. I just, you know you don't try, or she don't [does not] try and I'm not trying for him (*the teacher*) so (*pauses*).

I'm a pretty open person from the beginning, but there are like when we have substitutes, or somthin [something] you have to build up that trust barrier there and overcome it. I don't. It's just. I just think some teachers, they just, if they know too much, then it's gonna [going to] be a bad situation with their teaching. (*Rachele seemed to struggle with how to put her thoughts into words*)

I think it's better off just [keeping on a] teaching basis but, if they know more than they should know. I mean you can trust them with that, but my experience has been not to. I had problems with that in my junior high years, my teachers just shut me out, and you know they were there for me, but they weren't.

It was a bother to them to have to talk to me. Most of them would, I think maybe

it was just me, but I thought that they really don't. like I really need help on this, but they really don't want to talk to me. So, that they'd put on this smile act for me, like they were going to be there for me, but they actually weren't.

(described an observation of one teacher)

The teacher would have their back slanted towards the people that *(they)* didn't want to learn about, and be more focused on people that were hanging on *(with)* what he was saying, which is *(a)* natural human *(behavior)* you know.

I noticed the stances are the most thing[s], the easiest way to tell how they are positioned in the classroom *(to determine teacher acceptance)*. They don't look at you. They don't give you eye contact, *(or)* not willing to listen to what you have to say. You're just not really important to them, you can tell, or when you have something to say. Maybe there's not enough time left in class when you wanta [want to] say something. It's not really important to them when you have your hand raised, or when you do something, they don't look at it in a positive way. They *(teachers)* hold a grudge, my 7th grade teacher [was one] who held a grudge against me because of what my brother did.

Case Six: Talia

I don't think that teachers should judge people at all. Teachers should be there no matter what. If you ask them for help, they should be willing to help you.

Talia, a sophomore, appeared to be the most scared, insecure and empathetic compared to the other girls. Talia covered her face often when she talked. She used her hair or her hands to cover her face. Talia's spirit was caring and sensitive. At times I felt sad for Talia. She came to summer school because she just "didn't do" the assignments for an English class. Talia was unique to the group because she came from another

community four hours away, and was currently spending the summer with her older sister, so she could attend summer school and help her married sister. She told me school was difficult for her because, “I just can’t concentrate like in a regular school, you know, because all the kids are talking.” Talia told me that she didn’t know her GPA and was afraid to ask. “cause [because] I know it’s pretty low.”

Talia shared that her grades started improving at one point and stated that, “I did a lot better when they (*teachers*) told me that they believed in me.” She also stated that in her mind, “I think that they (*teachers*) don’t care what goes on with you, and that kind of hurts because you want them to help you, but yet they won’t.” She shared about an eighth grade teacher that “stood by me until I got it done. That helped me cause [because] I’m not very good at school.” I looked forward to talking with Talia, because it seemed to me that school was not a very secure place for her, especially high school. She talked often about how difficult it was to concentrate in school, and I wondered why.

While getting to know Talia I sensed that confiding in others was not easy for her. I asked her during her first interview if she had three or four people that came to mind that she absolutely loved as a teacher. She quickly told me “no.” During our interviews Talia stated “in elementary they (*teachers*) really want to help you and, then when you get into high school, they (*teachers*) don’t care; they just want you to get out of the high school.” She told me she wanted to participate in the study because “I thought it would be fun, and be something different and we could, like help people out, like teachers and stuff, on how to do stuff different instead of the way they do some of the things.” I wondered if this study allowed Talia to voice her opinion about teachers in hopes that they would change, not for her, but for those students that followed. With Talia, more than the other girls, I felt a strong responsibility to be her voice. She was so timid and

unsure of herself. Often she avoided eye contact with me and the other girls in the group during videotaping.

Talia talked more than once about her summer school teacher who was so “nice an [and] helpful.” When I asked if she had ever told the teacher how much she appreciated her help, Talia told me “no,” she was “scared to say anything.” Talia wrote in her journal:

When I first talked to you I wanted to mention that I think that Mrs. (name) is a really great teacher. She helped me out alot [a lot] and that is really what I needed because alot [a lot] of my high school teachers really don't care if you pass or not. They just want you to get out of their class and real soon.

As we talked more about this teacher, Talia did agree that she could write the teacher a note and give it to her as she was leaving on the last day of summer school, while walking out the door.

I don't know what Talia is currently doing, or even where she is right now because the only background information I had was what she supplied, or her summer school teacher offered. I'm not confident that Talia ever graduated from high school because of her comments concerning her lack of achievement and how difficult school was for her.

Talia's Themes

When I first sat down with Talia she stated:

I don't know. I got along with some. I got along with most of my teachers, and it was, like, we were friends. You know you could sit down and talk to them, and all this stuff. And that made me really change, because when I first started going to school I did not like to talk to anybody. And I would keep my problems and stuff to myself. And I wouldn't ever ask questions, but

then, like all the teachers and I started talking, so it really changed.

Then at one point Talia provided more insight:

I got along with all my elementary teachers cause they'd sit down and help me; and all this other stuff, and they were really nice. And they just like, if you went up to ask them a question or something, they wouldn't tell you to sit down, so I wish we could have elementary school teachers in the high school, that would be cool.

The three themes that evolved from Talia were (a) Teachers Should Help Us; It's Their Job", (b) Some Teachers Don't Even Care About Students, and (c) Some Teachers Treat Students Differently According To Gender. She focused most upon an eighth grade teacher, and her biology teacher, because they believed in her and helped her at school. Talia's biology teacher helped her, as well as told her that he believed in her, which made an influential impression for her. It was disturbing however, when Talia talked about this same biology teacher and the erratic behavior he demonstrated in class. Talia recalled:

Like if you're alone with him, and you like, or you like, did something wrong and he talks to you, he'll tell you that he believes in you. But when you're around other students, and other teachers, and stuff he just totally changes his attitude. My Biology teacher yelled at us a lot, even when we weren't doing anything wrong, he would yell at us. My Biology teacher, he's nice he's the only one in our school that would tell anybody that he believed in them (*students*).

(*researcher asked: Is he the one that yelled?*)

Yes, he can be nice or he can be mean. I don't know how to react to it, because

he can be nice one minute, and the next minute he'll be all yelling at you.

I don't know, I guess you just have to be ready for it. It just makes me feel weird, because I don't know, he was so nice and then all these other teachers and students get around and he's so mean. It makes you feel like you've done something wrong. Oh, I think all the other teachers believe in me, but he's really the only one that said it

Often, Talia shared that a "teacher should help you no matter what" . when giving her opinion of what teachers should do. Talia's first theme evolved from what she believed teachers should be expected to do.

4.16 Teachers Should Help Us; It's Their Job

Well in 8th grade I had this teacher, her name was Mrs. (name) she was really cool, and like when I was down in my classes she'd help me, and she'd stand by me until I got it done. And that really helped me out a lot because I'm not very good at school, and I found out that [those] teachers weren't so bad, so I just started talking to her more times. I don't know, when I first started going to school I had this fear of teachers that they were all mean and bad.

(talked about what she likes teachers to do)

Just helped [help] me a lot, and like the teacher will sit down and help me with everything that I need help with. Like if I was having problems with kids, I could tell them and they wouldn't say nothing [anything] to them. I don't know I just felt better to talk to them. And I asked them not to say anything. They said they wouldn't. It just felt really good to talk to them. Well they just like, if you have a problem or if I had a problem, they would help me out with it. And I would sit

there and (*they would*) explain it. And like, I could tell them anything, and they would help me. so that was good.

Like if I was gone, I would get bad grades in my classes. They'd sit there, and we would talk. And they would tell that they believe in me. And I think that they really helped. My grades started comin [coming] up, and I did a lot better in school when they told me that.

Well even though she's sexist toward guys, I liked my English class other than Romeo and Juliet, because we'd get in there and she'd lecture a little bit like maybe for 15 minutes of the class, and then we'd get the whole rest of the hour to work on whatever we wanted. Like if you have questions you can just walk up to her desk, or she'd come over to you and you could ask her your question, and she'd help.

Talia continued to write about what she liked teachers to do in her journal:

When I am encouraged by a teacher or someone else it makes me thank [think] that I can do it, and that I will do it. When someone encourages me it makes me feel really good. Some teacers [teachers] don't encourage students, because they don't care what the student does. That is why I think some students drop out of school.

I feel proud when a teacher and/or someone else has confudence [confidence] in what I do or what choices I make, and also in school. I think that everyone should have some confudence [confidence] in someone for at least one thing they do or the choice they make.

I feel teachers respect it when the students do what they are told to do and when you get your assignments in on time. That way they don't have to wait on you to

go on with the next unit. I think they also respect something when they have quit [quiet] students and ones that do their work instead of talking all the time.

Talia's second theme was similar to Rachele's theme, *I Feel Like A Bother To Some Teachers*. I identified Talia's thoughts of disappointments and lack of trust in teachers as her second theme.

4.17 *Some Teachers Don't Even Care About Students*

Oh yeah, he told me he would help me out, then when I'd go to ask him a question he would tell me to go sit down, so I thought, okay. Well my high school teachers. I don't know, they are just like what ever you say, or do, they just like go and tell everybody. So everybody in school thinks he is great because he puts on an act when he's around other teachers.

We asked for help all the time. He just sits in his desk and wouldn't help us, but then like [an] athlete came into the room and they wanted help, he'd help them, so I was like, this is great.

Some of them don't even care what you do. And some of them, like you can't even stay after school because they have things to do, and they don't want to take the time to help you. So you have to wait until the class begins, or go ask someone to help you.

(asked if she had ever gone to a teacher about how hard it is for her to concentrate when it is noisy in school)

There's one teacher that knows but she, no she didn't enforce it very well, and it's like I'm never doing this again.

In my mind they don't care what goes on with you, and that kind of

hurts because you want them to help you, but yet they won't.

Like if they tell you to do it on your own, and you don't understand it.

I think they should help you instead of just saying, well I explained it and blah blah blah!

Talia's final theme came from only a couple of teachers. The significance in reporting this theme is because her perception of what these teachers said and did is disturbing. Talia seemed less likely to be drawn toward teachers for any kind of assistance, compared to the other girls.

4.18 Some Teachers Treat Students Differently According To Gender

She really gets on them; the guys get in trouble more than the girls do, and we do the same stuff they do, and they get in trouble more. Than we do; and she's not married, she doesn't want to get married because her husband will just sit on his butt at the house and watch TV and eat, so she's single. She always puts them down, she says they're nothing but pigs, and all this other stuff.

Well there's another teacher in there that kind of does it, but he doesn't do it as bad as she does. I mean he's really sexist because he likes people that are out for sports and down to weight training, all this other stuff. So like if you don't go to weight training, or if you're not in sports, he doesn't talk to you. He doesn't pass you in his class.

Talia also wrote about sexism in her journal:

One of the hardest parts of being a female students [student] is some of the guy teachers don't think you can do some of the things that the guys in the same class as you can do. I have a couple of guy teachers that make the guys lift heavy

things for us girls because we cant' [can't] do any of that heavy lifting because we are not big and strong like them.

Case Seven: Stasa

An understanding teacher that like gets to know you, that's the kind of teacher I like.

Stasa was a petite, sixteen-year-old student with a delicate motherhood warm combined with a gaunting stare. It was important for me to convey to my readers Stasa's soft radiance that touched my heart each time we spoke. On June 14, 1999, I sat down with Stasa to complete our first interview. Her eyes were dark brown, and it was evident that she lacked sleep and nutrition. She was cautious of me at first and appeared very uncomfortable during our one-on-one interview. She couldn't think of any teachers to talk about when I first asked, except her principal and counselor. Stasa had just completed her sophomore year during the 1998-99 school year. She was in summer school because she had a baby boy at the beginning of the school year and wasn't able to keep up with all of her classes. The baby's father, a fifteen year old, had just returned to the community from incarceration. When I asked why the boy had been incarcerated she reported, "I'm not really sure why; I never asked him but I know it's stuff he's been doing for a long time, stealing and robbery, stupid things which I guess is good he got sent up." When Stasa talked about her boyfriend there was a lack of emotion in her voice.

Stasa's son was 9 months old, and she had spent the school year trying to keep up with classes while working two jobs because, she "won't live on welfare".

Stasa's GPA during 1998-99 was 2.12 during first semester and 2.14 during second

semester. I believe Stasa portrayed to me she was capable of being very successful in school.

When I asked Stasa about the support she received from family members it was apparent why her voice lacked emotion; she appeared to have a detached relationship with her mother, with whom she lived. "My mom goes out a lot; she goes out every day", "she drinks"; "after she divorced my dad she started to have her boyfriends; she's just like a teenager, she did keep our family together after the divorce and then she had two more children, that part I really admire."

Stasa talked about the verbal abuse she and her siblings experienced with their mother. Her mother was the reason Stasa will not ask for any support from social services. She was "scared" that her siblings would be taken out of the home because of her mother's drinking and verbal abuse. Stasa's father has not been involved with her life for a long time, and she was not sure where he lived. "(I) haven't seen him (*parent*) for seven or eight years, don't know where he is"; "he wanted to see my son but got arrested." Stasa only volunteered information about her father once and stated that she didn't have any memory of a relationship with him.

The longer we talked during our first interview, the more comfortable Stasa became with me. Her small frame relaxed in her chair and I saw a few smiles. When I asked a second time about teachers, she softly replied "in fourth grade I stayed after school everyday till 4:00 to help her (*teacher*) cause [because] she was really nice. And so like I talk[ed] to her sometimes like when you write [wrote] those letters to your favorite teacher, and she would always write me back". Then later, Stasa talked about a high school teacher she liked. "He'd say, you're a strong person, he always tells [told] me

all the time even when I slept in his class. He didn't care, he let me sleep just as long as I got everything done, he was like encouraging, [and] most of my teachers were."

I viewed Stasa as the caretaker in her family, looking out for her brothers and sister. Stasa appeared to be a very caring, gentle and emotionally drained person. I also thought that she probably avoided confrontations simply because she didn't have the physical stamina to take on any more in her life.

Stasa didn't show up for the first videotaping with the group of girls. She completed her summer school class early and disappeared shortly after June 14. It appeared Stasa would not be seen again. Then, one of the informants tracked her down and got a message to her about the July 1, videotaping. Stasa came with her son and shared that she wasn't living at home anymore. Both she and her son were sleeping on the floor at a girlfriend's house.

During the July 1 videotaping, Stasa sat off near a corner and placed her son on his blanket next to her, she often touched him during the interview. As the video taping went on she did laugh and look at the other girls as they spoke while keeping a close eye on her son, slowly becoming part of the group with her son by her side. When her son started to walk around, the girls in the group interacted with him and were accepting of him. After the group interview one of the girls' offered to watch Stasa's son so that she and I could complete any questions she missed for her second interview.

During June 2002, one of the informants was contacted to find out how Stasa had been doing these last few years. During the 1999-2000 school year, Stasa had another child by a different father and dropped out of school. The informant saw her recently at Stasa's brother's graduation. She attended the graduation with her two children.

Stasa's Themes

When I first sat down to interview Stasa during summer school she reported, “I don’t really tell my teachers things, personal kinds of things.” As I came to know Stasa it was clear that she did not trust anyone easily. Stasa held several secrets about her personal life inside her heart. She appeared to have a spirit that could easily break any moment. When we met I believed that Stasa was one of the two girls I thought to be the most at-risk of dropping out of school. Stasa was very controlled emotionally each time we met; never let her guard down, and most of her answers appeared safe. It was what Stasa did not voice that kept challenging me as the researcher.

Three themes emerged from Stasa’s conversations with me, (a) Influential Teachers Get To Know You . (b) Influential Teachers Have Control And Order In Their Classrooms (c) Some Teachers Don’t Listen Because They Don’t Want To Understand.

Stasa’s first theme was extracted from her responses about teachers she said she trusted.

4.19 Influential Teachers Get To Know You,

My first grade teacher I told you about, she has always been my favorite teacher, and especially since I had her for two grades. Like in grade school you have the teacher all day, and in high school you have them for just an hour everyday; so I mean I have some teachers that I like at senior high, but I liked her best cause [because] I was with her all day. She was really nice, and at the time my parents just got a divorce, and my mom was having another kid after she just had one; and it was just a hard time. But I would always talk with her, and I liked going to school then. I stayed after every day till 4:00 to help her with stuff, cause she was really

nice. And so like I talk to her sometimes, like when you write those letters to your favorite teacher, and she would always write me back. And I see her, so that's probably the only teacher, she always talks to me, she's pretty cool. She like made you do your stuff and you'd learn, and that is good in both ways cause [because]; oh I guess an understanding teacher that like gets to know you, that's the kind of teacher I like.

(Asked what does it mean to have a teacher believe in you, she responded with uncertainty)

I don't know, maybe trust them.

She just told me that she wanted to help me.

I have to feel I trust them, talk to them.

When I like came back to school and I was behind on my absences, a lot of them (teachers) were understanding about it

I switched to Mr. (name) and I like him a lot, he's a good teacher. I can understand it a lot better when I'm in his class. I did a lot better like the first test I took I had like a 95, before that I had like 40s and 50s (*in the other teacher's class*).

Mr. (name), he'd say you're a strong person. He always tell [told] me all the time, even when I slept in his class. He didn't care. He let me sleep, just as long as I got everything done. He was like encouraging, most of my teachers were. They wouldn't get mad at me. You can express your opinion a lot better, and you can like tell them what you think, and it's just easier to be in there.

I tried to seek more depth from Stasa when asking, what makes you think you can trust teachers? She replied, “They’re not going to judge you.” “You can trust them, big deal, you know they won’t tell”, and finally “it’s just ..(*they*) treat you like an adult.” Surprisingly, when Stasa was asked how many teachers she has trusted she stated, “half my teachers I had this spring. ” Then, Stasa was asked how many teachers she trusted from her school career, and she replied “like one of my elementary teachers, and no teachers from my middle school, and I imagine all my math teachers I’ve had.”

Stasa’s second theme emerged when she appeared to be talking about those teachers that had control and order in their classrooms. It appeared that Stasa prefers to become the teacher’s friend first, rather than the teacher seeking her friendship, when she shared what qualities are important for a teacher. Stasa appeared to gravitate toward teachers that had control and order in their classrooms.

4.20 Influential Teachers Have Control And Order In Their Classroom

My first year we learned a lot more cause [because] the teacher was stricter you know.

[I think they should] Acting like a teacher instead of wanting to be your friend.

Try to get along with you, but still have the control of the class.

If you get along with everyone, they (*students*) will respect you, respect you [and] have control of the class.

A lot of time [times] if they don’t expect anything from you, I take advantage of that. It makes it easier not to do anything. (*talked about a specific teacher*)

Expected me to have everything done which that’s fine with me.

Stasa's final theme was evident when she included thoughts on what pushed her away from developing an influential relationships with teachers. Stasa's voice was emotionally colorless when she talked about these distant teachers.

4.21 Some Teachers Don't Listen; Because They Don't Want to Understand

I don't know, cause they can't really understand cause [because] they are not in my situation. So, I don't know how I could explain it to them. A lot of times you don't want to listen, cause [because] you don't want to understand. When they're mean all the time, and make you feel stupid, so you don't want to be there.

(Her voice appeared hopeless when she talked about experiences of teachers misplacing her homework.)

Just put it on their desk and then they say they can't find it *(and they will say)* cause [because] you didn't hand it in, you have to do it again.

If you want to be a teacher, or teaching is something you want to do, some act like they don't want to. oh *(they're)* just angry all the time, not fun to be around.

I really don't want to try as hard *(if I don't connect with the teacher)*.

Usually if they don't want to help me, then I just get bored in their class and I like sleep or something. But if it's interesting and fun to be there, and they help you learn, and get stuff done faster. Like better also, if you understand what they're talking about. That's why I mean I like to be in classes where teachers aren't like mean you know. *(You know)* How some teachers are like that, they get mad at you for every little thing.

Case Eight: Mia

I don't skip class; I never did. If I did go to school, then I would go to all of my classes.

Mia was complex because she emerged in my mind as someone with an inner beauty, an outrageous sense of humor, as well as an outer, harsh, threatening demeanor that got her into trouble. We laughed together often while she recalled stories of some of her experiences with teachers. Mia had been a freshman for four months when I met her in summer school. She was in the tracker program through the court system. Mia was under house arrest and had limits on her activities. The tracker device placed around her ankle allowed authorities to determine if she was complying with her restrictions. She could attend school, and then was restricted to her home during the remainder of the day. Mia was in summer school because the judge ordered her to attend. During Mia's freshman year she did not obtain any credits from her classes because of her excessive absences. Mia participated in the study because her parole officer thought it would be a good experience for her.

Mia was on parole because she was arrested for assaulting another female adolescent in a city park during the 1998-99 school year. Mia, 5 foot 3 inches, was of average build. She was Hispanic, but English was her prominent language. She was born in this community and talked about several relatives that lived in the area. Her last name and some family members were well known with the local authorities according to one of my informants. She was the youngest of the girls and was always very animated during our one-on-one interviews. Mia was delightful to interview and had a keen insight into teachers' perceptions of her.

During the 1998-99 school year, Mia was truant 54 times, which appeared to be a trend when I reviewed her past school records. During 1998-99 her school records also documented nine illnesses, six parent request absences, one substance abuse incident, five in-school suspensions, and four times at Boys Town. There was a Boys Town Center available in the community for short term placements. Students that are placed at Boys Town during the school year are transported to school. Most placements at Boys Town are less than three weeks.

It was arranged for Mia to meet for her interviews after summer school class. During Mia's interviews, time was spent eating, drawing, and talking while completing the interviews. More time was spent with Mia in comparison to the other girls. Mia was the only girl that asked if we would meet as a group after completing the study. She wanted to know after talking with all the girls, what information was found out about relationships with teachers.

Mia missed so much school that her perceptions were essential to this study. It was critical to discover if teachers had encouraged her. Mia reported, "I trusted my eighth grade math teacher. I told her everything. I guess I felt like I could trust her with practically everything." She was "more like a friend than a teacher." Mia recalled a situation where she had "cussed in class," and this teacher "took me to the hall to talk about why," rather than sending her immediately to the principal. Mia appeared to be impressed with this teacher because she didn't react the way most other teachers did with her inappropriate behavior. The teacher told her that she wasn't going to tell the principal about the situation this time, but would if there were any more occurrences. Mia told me that she "waited to see if she'd (teacher) tell the principal, she (teacher) didn't, so (I) trusted her."

As our relationship evolved it appeared important to Mia that she not be judged by her past behavior. On one occasion she expressed to me that:

If they get a kid in there that they know has been in trouble, say like me: if I walk in there in the classroom, and they like oh, here we go like trouble maker. You know, or they hear from other teachers that she's been in trouble you know, and they like judge you from that. Cause [Because] if I have teachers in the school, I want them to judge the kid how they met [meet] them right now, not by their past. And yea, you might treat them different [differently] cause [because] of the past, but try to start over with that kid you know. [You should] not judge them on their past. cause [because] everybody deserves at least a second chance.

Mia missed our last group interview session because she was at the local hospital with a friend that had been shot over a gang situation. I tried, but was unsuccessful in contacting Mia to obtain her sketchpad and journal. During our sessions she had shared some of her journal writing with me. Unfortunately, I never saw Mia, the sketchpad, or journal after our sessions ended.

Mia began her 1999-2000 school year in the alternative high school as a freshman again. During the first semester her records indicated that she was truant 13 times, trespassed nine times, and had one occurrence of substance abuse. In November 1999, an informant at the high school was contacted to find out how Mia was doing at school. I was told that Mia had exploded in front of her principal a few months into the new school year, and walked out proclaiming, "Fuck this shit". According to the informant the school had not been in contact with her since the explosion. During June 2002, while I was meeting with an informant from the high school, Mia's name surfaced in the

discussion. Surprisingly, she had returned to school in January of 2002, and attended for a week, then disappeared again. No one from the school has been in contact with Mia since January, so her current situation is unknown.

Mia's Themes

Two themes peppered Mia's interviews, (a) Influential Teachers Are Thoughtful And Optimistic, and (b) Some Teachers Are Just Hopeless Workers. Mia's first theme seemed appropriate when she talked about her eighth grade reading and math teachers that appeared to be influential in her life. Those math and reading teachers offered her hope, and were viewed as friends, because they did not appear to hold any preconceived picture of Mia based upon her reputation.

4.22 Influential Teachers Are Thoughtful And Optimistic

There were a couple of them I got along with really good, and they would tell me it's nice to see you here finally. They would kind of sit down, and say, like where were you? Why have you been gone? You know you're not going to be passing if you miss this many days. You're doing really good when you're here. You have a one or a two when you are here. You need to start comin [coming] more and pass; and they would try to encourage me. And then some would like, oh, you're here.

My eighth grade math teacher, that was when I was getting into trouble and stuff I just told her everything, I guess I felt like I could trust her with practically everything. She was really nice about it. She explained why she was doin [doing] things. Most teachers would like, you're going to be moved cause you don't pay attention, and she sat down and had a meeting with us and explained things. And she was like a friend, she'd take us out in the hall if we

looked mad or sad about something. (*the teacher would say*) What's going on?

She knew whom we hung out with, who we talked to. And if we were mad about something and didn't want to talk about it, she'd ask one of our friends why we were mad. She was like a friend, [rather] than a teacher to all of us. I guess it doesn't matter about the age, but she was younger an [and] she was more like a friend, than a teacher. And so, I guess one time I told her something. I had cussed in the class, and I didn't know her, an [and] I said, well all you're going to do is tell the principal; and it was with another girl. We were arguing, and she said, come out in the hall, we need to have a talk about it. (*Mia said*) Why? All you're going to do is tell me to go to the principal's office, I'll just go right now, and she said no, you're going to come out and talk with me. And I was like all right, and so we were out in the hall and she said, now I don't want you to think bad of me, but I'm not going to even tell the principal, but next time it happens I'll have to tell the principal. I just want to know why you don't like her, so I told her why I didn't like her and what was going on. And she said, well I don't like her either, but you can't be saying that in the class. And I was like I know she was trying to explain what to do and so she put her clear across the room, so I didn't have to think about her. So I guess I waited a while to see if she did go to the principal, but it didn't happen. I guess that's when I sort of trusted her. I just call her by her last name, not Miss or Mrs., and she always knew it was me. She was so nice. I thought of her like a friend instead of a teacher. I'd miss a couple of days, I'd come in and she'd like, well it's good to see you here today. And she tried to be really friendly and stuff. I don't know she was really nice about everything.

She brought up my hopes a lot, she helped me realize what I could do, and what I couldn't do.

My reading teacher she was really nice, um she was I mean she was really nice too. I'd miss a couple days. I'd come in, and she'd like well it's good to see you here today. And she tried to be really friendly and stuff. I don't know she was really nice about stuff. She'd just wait, and I'd like well I read two sentences isn't somebody else going to read? And she'd like, oh you're doin [doing] great girl you keep goin [going]. She'd say you were such a good reader there was only a few words that gave you some problems. There are some harder words in this book, but I can help you when you come up to them. I'll help you read. She was really nice about it, and helped me out a lot with that.

(Mia compared her influential teachers)

They'd be like let's sit down and I'll help, and if I didn't understand it, I wasn't doin [doing] it, and they'd be like let's sit down and I'll help. So they'd sit there and say you're really bright if you just set your mind to it and read up a little bit. She'd sit with me at every class gettin [getting] me caught up on everything, and she'd read the whole book to me if she had to.

If I had problems I would go to Ms. (name) and Ms. (name) my reading teacher cause she was always there for me too. They'd tell what to say to my counselor, and go with me to my counselor. Like change my classes or something like that. It was kinda [kind of] nice havin [having] her as a teacher, *(mimics teacher)* well let's see what we got today, well I'll help you with this, and you can do this one on your own.

I'd say the two I trusted the most were my third grade teacher and my

eight grade math teacher, those are really the only two that I trusted with everything. We could ask the teachers questions, it was just kinda [kind of] nice to be able to do that.

(Mia mentioned her relationship with an in-school suspension supervisor)

I'd get my stuff and start walking out, and he'd say, I did not call Mia, no sit down and we'd argue like friends, and I go sit down.

Mia's second theme included a balance of what she had experienced, as well as what she believed about how teachers should change. Mia, was delightfully entertaining during the research study while under house arrest, and was only disrespectfully tough by reputation.

4.23 *Some Teachers Are Just Hopeless Workers*

(teachers told Mia) You don't want to go to school. You just go to see your friends; and you're nothin [nothing] but a troublemaker.

I think teachers should be there for their students but I think they shouldn't just you know wanna [want to] help one student. They should try to help, let all of them know that you are there. And the ones that are there and want help, but let the others know that they can *(ask for help too)*.

Put your trust in them *(students)* even if they do mess up. They'll make mistakes just put your trust in them an [and] keep giving them encouragement; either they'll do it right, or they'll mess up, but everybody makes mistakes.

If they *(teachers)* acted more like a person than like a teacher that knows everything in front of kids, to me, the teachers act like that. We're just kids, we don't know nothin [anything]. This is why we're there, we gotta [have to] do what they say, *(teachers think)* we don't know nothing [anything] about it.

(*long pause*)

They are always right, not all teachers. And I don't know, they should like (*ask*) more of our opinions and how we think. Not if they are going to act better than us. Then why are we going to pay attention? I think if they acted more like us, and let us speak our opinion, and then we'll want to listen. They had to do what we do. They had to read it too, but they just read it before us. So they know before us. They just like don't want to listen to us; like yea, whatever and blow it off, ya [you] know. We're just kids we don't know nothing [anything]. That is why we're there. We gotta [have to] do what they say. We don't know nothin [anything] about it, they are always right!

I think if they acted more like us, and let us speak our opinion, then we'll want to listen. Like they are just listening, or they are not really listening, they're just acting like it, yea, like hurry up, you don't even know what you're talking about. They'd be like, well you're never here, and you always say that you don't understand any ways [anyway], so I don't know why we try.

(Mia's response *when asked if she helps out other kids when they are in trouble*)

I've gotten kicked out of classes for it, in school suspension and suspended out of school for it. And it's like this is none of your problem stay out of it, and I'm like if that was happening to me I'd want somebody to stick up for me. I've gotten in a lot of trouble for that kind of stuff (*laughs*).

I don't know, not to make friends with them cause [because] that's what most girls want. Like ya [you] know, junior high, high school, even elementary you go through problems. Ya [you] know boys don't like you, whatever. I think they need to be more of a friend, not just a teacher. Let um, (*pause*) know they are

there, even when they don't want to talk cause [because] when they do want to talk. And I don't know like, just think of some of the problems they used to have.

Focus Group Findings

Two focus group interviews were conducted in conjunction with individual interviews. Focus groups are used to observe a “large amount of interaction on a topic, in a limited period of time” based on the researcher’s ability to organize and focus the group sessions (Wolcott, 1997, p. 8). Efficiency is a strength focus groups offer. Two eight-person focus groups could produce as many ideas as 10 individual interviews. Working with two focus groups can be “more efficient” than individual interviews, given the amount of time an interview can take (Wolcott, 1997, p. 15). Focus groups were used in this study as a complementary technique, rather than a time saving device.

In this multiple case study, focus groups were utilized to provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants’ opinions and experiences in contrast to their individual interviews. Often during the focus group meetings the girls summarized what they had shared during their individual interviews.

All of the respondents were aware of the girls from summer school who were participating in this study. During the first focus group meeting one member was missing. The girls were uncomfortable at first, but after Carmen and Rachele began talking, the atmosphere in the room became more relaxed. The girls initially complained about using a video camera to document what they were saying, but none of the girls stated they did not want to be video taped. At first the interviewer controlled the camera. Then later, the camera was passed to Sonia. About 15 minutes into the

focus group meeting, the girls seemed to forget about the camera and appeared to talk easily.

Part way through the first focus group meeting, Sonia pointed the camera at the interviewer and asked, "Well, how do YOU FEEL about it?" The girls were discussing what moved them towards developing a positive relationship with a teacher. Each girl provided a variety of situations that centered around getting students involved in the learning, such as, "be more creative in their teaching", "it's so boring (*when*) he hands out a(n) outline and goes over it everyday", "it gets so monotonous", "have the whole class discuss". or "one day a week talk about stuff everybody had an opinion of." In response to Sonia's request I stated:

I think that I would agree that sometimes teachers go through the curriculum, and they focus so much on the curriculum, and they tend to forget about what drove them toward getting into teaching. I actually think teaching is an art, and that you have to put yourself into the content area. If you choose social studies to teach, what drove you to that content? If it was a love for the history, or a love for the social area, be able to bring yourself into that content area, or find the things in that content area and bring it to life to make it exciting.

It's hard because those are not in a book, and I don't think that you should be able to find all the answers in a book. You have to find answers everywhere, and ultimately when you go outside of school you're goin [going] to have to figure out problems that there aren't any solutions for. And you need to know how to determine solutions you won't find in a book. You need to know how to approach that. I think the biggest skill that you need to learn is getting along with others.

In listening to the girls talk about what moved them towards developing a positive relationship with a teacher it became evident that when teachers allowed the girls to be more interactive in the classroom they tended to enjoy the teacher and class more.

During the second focus group meeting the girls continued to supply attributes that they believed all teachers should exhibit. They reported, teachers should “be open minded”, “be patient”, “have a sense of humor”, “enjoy being around kids” and, “be able to give discipline at the right time.” The attributes described by the girls are the same kind of attributes that most school districts look for in their teacher candidates. It was insightful to hear these at-risk high school girls easily list these attributes.

Focus Group Themes

There were many similarities between what the girls shared individually and what they shared during the focus group meetings. Four themes emerged from the two focus group meetings: (a) Influential Teachers Provide Encouragement, (b) Influential Teachers Develop Friendships Because They Care, (c) Some Teachers Are Just Plain Hopeless and (d) At Times High School Is Just A Game.

4.24 Influential Teachers Provide Encouragement

(Carmen)

Teachers should be there to help you with academics, and they should be there to help you; and (be) willing to talk about anything.

(Rachele)

How to get to a student is to, to show you care and do a little extra effort.

[When a] *(teacher)* tells you, you can do it, you can! You will believe more in yourself when they have more confidence in you. You [also, then] have more confidence in yourself.

The second theme resulted from the question, “How many teachers have been important to you in some way?”

4.25 *Influential Teachers Develop Friendships Because They Care*

(Rachele)

When a teacher tells you [something] , it should be like [talking with] a friend.

When a friend tells you a secret that they don't want you to tell others [you should not tell their secret].

(Carmen)

It was Mr. (name), [that was important to me. He taught] earth science; it was at [during] (Middle School). [because] I always liked Mr. (name). I thought he was nice; and I don't know. we'd talk about stuff outside of class, and not what was goin [going] on in school. And I just got along with him really well. I don't know why.

(Sonia)

There has [have] been a couple of teachers that I've had that have been pretty important to me cause [because] pretty much what Carmen talked about, they talked to me outside of class. They like teaching. They enjoy teaching and they know where their priorities are. They know the students are their first priority; that the teaching is their first priority. You pick it up by the way they act and the way [they] respond to things; and the way they treat you.

(Mia)

I had a math teacher [in Middle School], she was new ya [you] know. and so she wanted to know what was going on in your life. you know. And so, like you'd get into trouble. Instead of sending you to the office, she would take you outside in the hall and ask me, you. what was goin [going] on. Like why

don't you like that person, ya [you] know. She was more interested in what you thought. than gettin [getting] ya [you] in trouble, ya [you] know. They care about what you're thinking instead of always assuming they know. Let them (students) know they are there, in case you want to talk with them, not pressure them to talk.

(Ginah)

Well my teachers. or a couple of them I liked. They would talk more bout [about] life, and how to handle situations, and stuff like that, and I liked it better.

(Rachele)

Ask you at the end of class, ask you not that you have to tell, but show you [that] they care throughout the whole time you are in class. Not like make it a public notice just to show they care.

The third theme emerged when the girls talked about those teachers they pull away from. do not trust; or those teachers they viewed as just a worker going through the motions of their job. These hopeless teachers did not appear to know how to develop a relationship based upon the girls' terms. It seemed that the girls had established a line for teacher relationships between acceptable and intruding. If a teacher crossed this line the girls established, then the girls backed away from that teacher.

4.26 Some Teachers Are Just Plain Hopeless

(Rachele)

There are a lot of things that happen in high school that they (*teachers*) know nothing about.

(Like what?)

I mean like everything.

(Ginah)

Like if you're having problems and it affects what you do in class; like some don't care.

(Carmen)

I don't like it when they ask you personal questions. I think they're being nosy. I think the reason I don't like it from teachers is you know, they're gonna [going to] go off an [and] tell one of the teachers.

(Rachele)

Put yourself in our position. If they had the class, what did your class do to make us leave (*skip*) cause [because] if we enjoyed the class we wouldn't leave (*skip*).

(Carmen)

I think if there were good teachers students wouldn't skip.

(Rachele)

When I look at a teacher, I'm not mad at teachers for the way they teach.

I'm mad when teachers don't change, but you can't blame the teacher.

It hurts a student to um, call on a certain group of people, and refuse to call on them for certain reasons.

(Sonia)

It's the responsibility of the teacher, how they act towards the kids.

They have to want to teach us. Some of them don't even want to be there.

They don't care. They have to want to be there, not just give you homework; and actually go through stuff. They just pretend that they want to be there

(Carmen)

They (*teachers*) judge them (*kids*), by what they wear and other things that they hear outside of class.

(Mia)

Not judge them either about your past, or bring up your past and give um [them] a chance to show, um, how they really are. Not just think of the past [to determine their character].

(Talía)

I don't think they should judge people at all no matter what you do, or what you've done, or how you act they just shouldn't judge ya [you].

Teachers that were viewed as hopeless were also seen as poor instructors. These hopeless teachers did not appear to know how to engage the girls in their learning. In these teachers' classrooms the girls appeared to vanish, or just go through the motions of learning without any connection to the material or relationship to the instructor. In some situations these teachers were suspicious or questioned the girls' ability to think. These are the same teachers that presumed the girls would be unsuccessful, therefore they provided the test questions, or just let them fail.

(Carmen)

A lot of teachers let you copy the test.

(Rachele)

(names a teacher) He let us, the students copied the test, and you liked it cause [because] you didn't have to do work; but in the long run we wished that we did have to do stuff

(Sonia)

You want it to be fair, and everybody not have so much favoritism

(Rachele)

Like math, they all hand out the same assignment you know. The teachers give you the same information, you know. If one is in a bad mood, then I'll go to another one for help, so it is easier for me to have a relationship with

all my math teachers. The tests are all the same through out math, or like geometry. you know. One time I had a take home test that I didn't understand, and I called one of my teachers and we went through it on the phone together. And I got a 100 you know, then my math teacher said, 'you understood this the best when other students didn't understand it, and they failed it, and you aced it. How did you do that when no other student understood it? Everyone else failed it'. And I said, well I called for help. She didn't think, you know of that, now why wouldn't you do that?

(Carmen)

I think some teachers do, they focus on that one kid and forget the rest, and it is a like a horrible class.

(How can a teacher affect your confidence?)

(Carmen)

I always hear from teachers, you have the potential to do better and I just want to say, *oh god you don't know me!*

(Mia)

So he would never give me a chance. He'd say you don't care, and I'd say if I didn't care why am I sitting here? And I'd say, why wouldn't I just walk out? And he'd say well go ahead. They tell you, you can't make it, and you don't get a chance. Well if you don't want it, why would you come back?

The fourth and final theme that emerged was unique only to the focus group meetings. The girls started to talk about their high school peer relationships during one meeting. According to Robert Pianta (1999) interpersonal relationships (child-parent, peer-peer, parent-parent, teacher-child) are dyadic systems that play key roles in the regulation of child behavior. Interactions between two people, over time and across many

settings, become patterns; these patterns reflect relationships shared by individuals (Pianta, 1999, p. 28). These relationship experiences shape other relationships. School is a place where many relationships occur with a variety of individuals; some relationships are subtle, moment to moment, while some extend over long periods of time. The topic of peer relationships erupted as the girls transition from talking about job descriptions for teachers to what happens in high school that teachers know nothing about.

4.27 At Times High School Is Just A Game

(Rachele)

I think people are really two faced

(Mia)

Everybody in here is probably older than me. You know, there are certain friends; but why would you want to go hang out [with them] when you can't trust them?

(Molly)

Trust them, I can't even trust my family. I've been through so many friends in the last six months. It's been terrible. I have had so many friends that have written me off. Nobody cares. I've thought about suicide. People don't , people don't care about anything but themselves.

(Rachele)

Look at me and I missed out on a year, so I don't know our class. As

I look at our class, they're all two faced everybody is. Always stuck on their self. I just laugh at them, and when they come back in 20 years they will regret a lot of things they've done. And then if people get up, and talk to you this year; and when they come back in 20 years just accept it cause they're grown up.

I tell them something and then we'll have a fight and they go off, and there goes my business all over the place, and I'm still holdin [holding] their secrets.

(Mia)

I'm like that too. My friend , we were really really close, and she and I got into a big fight. you know. This person said I was a bitch, and everything I told her, everybodys [everybody] heard it, you know; but I won't tell them everything she told me. you know.

(Rachele)

To me high school is just a game basically: you can beat it or let it beat you.

Cross Case Analysis of the Eight Cases

Linking categories and concepts into a model of what these eight at-risk high school girls perceived as influential teachers was a lengthy process. Several levels of data analysis are possible in a qualitative case study. Moving from concrete explanations of observable data to a more abstract level involved using concepts to describe phenomena. Systematically classifying data into some sort of schema consisted of categories and themes that occurred at different layers. Categories and themes “describe the data, but to some extent they also interpret the data” (Merriam, 2001, p. 187). A final level of analysis involves making inferences, developing models, or generating theory. It is a process that Miles and Huberman (1994) describe as moving up “from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape” (p. 261).

According to Merriam (2001), “sensitivity, or being intuitive” is needed for qualitative case study researchers (p.21). As a qualitative researcher I was sensitive to several variables involved in this study. The variables I considered included how the girls presented themselves, their voice tones, and several school documents. The girls erupted with laughter, appeared sad at times and talked of issues they did not understand about teachers' behaviors during their interviews.

Analyzing data that was gathered two years ago was easily distanced from any emotional connections established by the researcher with the girls during interviews. Spending two years transcribing the interviews allowed the researcher time to move toward the theorist role, and away from the participant in this study.

Some teacher - student relationships have been identified as “close and affectionate”, “distant and formal”, or conflictual” (Pinata, 1999, p. 69). All of the girls identified a variety of perspectives, experiences, and ideas about teacher relationships while participating in this multiple case study. Four themes emerged from the cross case analysis after compiling all of the data in this multiple case study; (a) Teachers Should Be Allies To Students, (b) Relationships With Teachers Were Often Superficial, (c) Good Teachers Are Supporters To Students, and (d) At Times School Seemed Pointless. These themes appeared to best identify the essence of what these eight at-risk high school girls provided during their interviews. The four themes are summarized here in order of importance and discussed at length in Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations.

Cross Case Analysis Themes

4.27 The Girls' Said Teachers Should Be Allies To Students

According to the girls, when teachers act as allies, they appeared to be perceived as uniting or joining together to learn. Partners in learning appeared important to the girls. All of the girls realized that they were in school to learn, but they also said that teachers did not know everything there is to know. All the girls eagerly shared the excitement of discussing issues and ideas from their world with their teachers in a collaborative way.

4.28 The Girls Described Relationships With Teachers Who Were Distant

Six of the girls identified situations where teachers were prejudiced, shallow or

ignorant. The girls identified teachers that appeared to just go through the motions of teaching without making any deep connection with the topic, or the students. These teachers pretended to like their job, according to the girls. It was disturbing and confusing to these female students to have a teacher that did not appear to enjoy students or teaching. Rachele touched upon an insightful feminist perspective when she offered her thoughts about the differences between male and female teachers. She reported that female teachers ask “what did you learn”, while male teachers “just want to get it over with.”

4.29 The Girls Said Good Teachers Are Supporters To Students

Five of the girls in this study identified times that they had felt like the teacher had been supportive of them or their ideas, as well as the need for teachers to be supportive. Carmen made statements about teachers who did not truly know what students did, or what they encountered in high school. When the girls perceived that the teachers were supporting, encouraging and helpful, they viewed those teachers as advocates

4.30 At Times School Seemed Pointless to the Girls

There were times in school when four of the girls identified experiences or teachers that were pointless, times when the learning in school appeared to be senseless. The teachers did not appear clear or explicit in what they wanted the students to learn or accomplish. In these situations the girls seemed to approach the situation from a hopeless perspective, as if there was nothing they could do to better the situation. The girls seemed to just go through the motions of learning while they were in these classrooms they perceived as pointless environments.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

To have any effect on either the practice or the theory of education, studies must be rigorously conducted and, they need to present insights and conclusions that seem true to readers, educators, and other researchers. Additionally, a qualitative study must provide the reader with a landscape drawn in enough detail to show that the author's conclusion makes sense (Merriam, 2001, p.199).

The intent of this study was to capture a glimpse of eight at-risk high school girls and the teachers they hailed as influential. Influential teachers were defined as important as determined by each girl's words. This dissertation was written from a feminist perspective. Using a feminist perspective, I looked at each of the girls as a qualified resource of knowledge on the topic of influential teachers. Feminist thinkers emphasize women's special concern for the "preservation of relationships and their nurturing role" (Govier, 1992, p. 16). As an advocate for the girls' voices, I attempted to craft each case as a true portrait of each girl. As a female researcher I was critically aware when the girls mentioned thoughts or ideas that continued to support their lower-power status. According to Sadker & Sadker (1994), many girls feel helpless, hopeless, and stressed. It has also been documented that girls may behave in this helpless fashion in order to get their own way (Hochschild, 1973). 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.

Entering the world of these girls as a participant, and a researcher, I was committed to knowing each girl as an individual, and also part of a group. A few months

after the interviews were completed, Carmen asked if the “girls had given me anything important for my study”. Six months after the study Rachele wanted me to know that Mia had attended the alternative school in the fall of 1999 and dropped out. At the conclusion of the interviews I did not think I had developed a bond with the girls. It was only after talking with Carmen and Rachele, months after the interviews were concluded that I felt I had established a connection with at least some of these eight at-risk high school females.

In qualitative research, data analysis is often custom built and revised throughout the study. Writers of qualitative research craft each study differently, using analytic procedures that evolve in the field. This process of data analysis supports the themes that qualitative research is largely concluded from insight, intuition and impression by the researcher (Creswell, 1998, p.142). The data generated from qualitative methods are typically plentiful. Sitting down to make sense of pages of interviews, video tapes and notes was overwhelming and exciting while on the journey to make sense of what I learned from these eight at-risk high school girls.

The analysis process in this study began with data management. This first stage required me to organize my data so that I could convert the transcripts into ideas for analysis. Following this organization and conversion of data into ideas I spent time determining how to take the ideas and form themes. This was a three step process since I was seeking themes within each case, in the focus group, and finally with those themes that crossed over the eight cases.

Sub Questions

The six sub questions I considered in this research helped provide me with a path that guided me towards making sense of my data:

- Q1 - How do female students describe their educational experiences?
- Q2 - What experiences do female students divulge when asked about their relationships with teachers?
- Q3 - How do female students describe their relationships with teachers?
- Q4 - What do female students perceive as preconditions for developing influential relationships with teachers?
- Q5 - What do female students describe as evidence that guided them toward developing influential relationships with teachers?
- Q6 - What do female students describe as evidence that guided them away from developing influential relationships with teachers?

Topical Sub Questions

Four topical sub questions were also considered while I was interviewing the girls and conducting the focus group discussions. Topical sub questions in a qualitative study follow the central underlying question. Sub questions cover the anticipated needs for information as well as anticipated procedures in the study for data analysis and reporting the study. The four topical sub questions foreshadowed my course used in this study, and served as a guide through the steps in the plan of data collection, analysis, and narrative format construction (Creswell, 1998).

5.01 Q1 - How will female students describe their relationships with teachers?

Overall, the data gathered from the girls provided evidence of teachers that were influential to six of the girls at different times in their school careers. According to Galbo (1983), only “seven percent of adolescents” they studied “perceived teachers as influential adults” (p. 422). In this study six of the girls were able to relate situations where a teacher appeared to be influential in their lives at a particular moment. To be

considered influential I looked for the girls' descriptions of teachers to include words such as important, cool, friend, listened, respected or motivated. It would be important to determine in future research if the ratio is similar to my findings that six out of eight at-risk girls identified influential teachers. Each of the girls in this multiple case study presented unique intricacies to their character. A good case study "presents people as complex creatures through their data" (Stake, 1995, p. 97). Those unique complexities emerged during the girls' comments about relationships with teachers, and also during additional perceptions of teachers they were willing to divulge. Six of the eight girls talked about specific teachers in influential terms of being trustworthy, willing to help or listen, encouraging, showing interest in listening to them, always willing to talk, and someone they would go to for help.

Carmen did not identify any teachers she appeared to label as influential. Although Carmen did describe some teachers she liked as nice, fun in class or someone she could learn from. Carmen talked negatively about teachers asking her personal questions and being nosy. Carmen was the only girl that stated, "You learn absolutely nothin [nothing] from your best teachers."

Ginah, would be the other girl that did not talk about teachers as having an influential impact on her life, and did not indicate any teachers she went to for help. Ginah talked about teachers she liked, mostly because she knew them as neighbors or she baby-sat for them. When Ginah needed help with schoolwork she asked her parents rather than one of her teachers.

Both Carmen and Ginah came from two different home experiences. Both girls also attended different kinds of high schools, one public and the other parochial. In checking back on these girls Carmen is now successful, while Ginah appeared in court for

drugs. Looking back I do not think that would of been my conclusion for these girls in their life after high school, based upon how they both presented themselves during the study.

Considering the second topical question, I concluded:

5.02 Q2 - What themes emerged from gathering information about this multiple case?

a. First Theme: The Girls Said Teachers Should Be Allies To Students

Six of the girls talked about the theme. *The Girls Said Teachers Should Be Allies To Students*. They included ideas such as friend, ability to relate, believing in you, and uniting with students for a specific purpose. The specific purposes could include guiding a student to become a better person, or providing academic help or emotional support. The six girls talked about going to teachers after school for assistance whether they needed it or not. The girls also talked about a teacher that noticed them needing additional academic or emotional attention. The girls spoke of teachers that would sit down with them to help with assignments. These teachers offered words of encouragement, telling girls they were “bright”. or “if you set your mind to it” the girls could “do it”.

Teachers often provide students with subtle words of encouragement, but it should be noted how powerful and important those encouraging words are to an at-risk female student. According to Sonia, “Believing in someone has a lot to do with trust because if you don’t trust someone you’re not going to believe what they say”. According to Sonia. “Belief in someone and trust are synonymous”.

Teachers are in a position to offer students trust and encouragement. Through teacher relationships that convey high expectations, students can learn to believe in themselves and in their futures. It is imperative that teachers stimulate in students a

motivation to learn. Creating ongoing opportunities for self-reflection, critical inquiry, problem solving, and dialogue with students, teachers can develop a sense of ownership for learning. (Benard, 1995). It was in this area that some of the girls identified differences between male and female teachers. Rachele stated that female teachers ask the important questions, the why questions. Rachele also stated that it was the male teachers that tend to ask a question, call on the first hand that goes up and move on. Her specific words were "get in - get out." Male teachers to some of the girls appeared more business like, while the female teachers were more nurturing. Carmen and Ginah did not appear to note many differences between gender, but focused more upon the specific individual as a teacher. Some male teachers were described as caring, while some female teachers were not viewed as nurturing.

b. Second Theme: The Girls Described Relationships with Teachers Who Were Distant

The second theme, *The Girls Described Relationships with Teachers Who Were Distant*, was sprinkled throughout the interviews of six girls when they talked about teachers keeping their distance, feeling intimidated in class, experiencing a sexist environment, and those teachers that did not follow through with promises. It was frustrating to hear the girls talk about, "Oh yeah, he told me he would help me out. then when I'd go to ask him a question he would tell me to go sit down. so I thought, okay." The six girls remarked about classrooms where male students were given preferential treatment and noted "it would seem our guy friends attitudes would change when they would walk into his classroom". Although the girls expressed "we have a brain too, we can use it", none of the girls challenged a teacher in a male dominated environment. Sonia talked about a time, "I was intimidated by him; he was scary. He taught his class like it was the military". In these male dominated classrooms the girls noted that their grades

were poor, and their solution was to either take the class over with a different teacher or go to another teacher they liked for help.

Taking a class over could be a way of silently protesting the teacher. The girls used this strategy to prove to themselves that they were capable of success. All of the girls that had taken a class over received a better grade and also talked about liking and understanding the second teacher better. In some situations the girls utilized the strategy of going to another instructor for help to get through the class. The girls utilized these strategies for academic survival. Mia, on the other hand, was the only female that did not use the strategies the girls discussed. The strategy she engaged when presented with a negative attitude from a teacher was absence; she simply didn't attend school.

Research on teacher effectiveness has shown that there is considerable variation in teacher behavior within classrooms. How a student perceives and gives meaning to classroom experiences affect motivation. Teachers that teach in a working class culture frequently become fixated on the structured learning aspects, while ignoring the importance of moving toward more active, independent learning for all students (Levine, 1996, p.438). Teachers should understand the effects of classroom environments on students' motivation and achievement because different techniques may have different effects on different students, depending on the students' prior experiences. Taking time to know students occurs in elementary and middle schools because of how those schools are organized. Students in elementary typically stay with the same teacher all day. Then during middle school, students are organized in teams where they are exposed to a limited number of teachers. The typical high school organization limits the ability of most teachers to know all of their students well because of the vast numbers of students those

teachers work with each day. Should high schools be organized in different ways is a question that could be answered by further research.

c. Third Theme: The Girls Said Good Teachers Are Supporters To Students

The theme, *The Girls Said Good Teachers Are Supporters To Students*, was evident in five of the girls' comments after conducting the cross case analysis. Ideas like trust, explicit teaching, encouragement and an advocate were identified in their comments. "When teachers actually sit down and talk to you and ask you if there is anything they can help you with, it really pushes your self esteem." When teachers were perceived as wanting to teach you, the girls reported that they were motivated to learn. Some teachers appeared to "explain stuff thoroughly and very well" while giving class time for help. Helping the girls to "feel better" was evident when the teacher recognized they needed additional time to learn. "To expect to have a good student you need to put trust on [in] them and they can trust you." Building a relationship where both parties feel they can trust each other appeared to be important to the girls. To rely on teachers to do what they say consistently appeared necessary for these girls to trust and believe a teacher.

Some studies have suggested that motivation accounts for 16% - 20% of the variation in student achievement. Fyans and Maehr (1989) found motivation accounted for up to a 38% variance in student achievement. When the girls appeared to trust their teacher, and believed what they said, and listened when teachers provided encouragement; they were motivated to learn. Therefore, providing a better match between classroom instruction and students' conceptual levels and learning styles are critical for these at-risk students, as well as other students.

The community where this multiple case study took place could be considered a working class community. According to Levine (1996), learning is often defined in

working class schools as following the steps of a procedure, and simply involving rote behavior or learning. The teacher puts information on the board and the students' copy that information, with little discussion. Whole class activities tend to be highly teacher structured and controlled, and student participation is generally limited to answering teacher questions. All of the girls in this study talked about experiencing these highly teacher structured and controlled classrooms. Allowing for choice and some student control can foster an internal locus of control and motivation in students, something that lacked in the classrooms where the girls referred to teachers as highly structured and controlled during class (Levin, 1996, p. 209).

The girls stated that they received praise, criticism, affirmation and neutral feedback from their teachers. The teachers that were explicit in their teaching seemed to help the girls understand the content. The girls expressed frustration with those teachers who did not seem to know their content area or hurried through information like a "drill sergeant." The girls talked about feeling frustrated when trying to complete their homework when none of the examples matched the examples presented in class.

The girls viewed supporting teachers as those teachers that have a sense of just how much information they should present and when. This same intuitive sense was also evident when the girls talked about how teachers should care about them, without getting nosy. The girls expected and wanted their teachers to have an intuitive sense of when to approach them and when to stay away. Being intuitive may not come easily for all teachers. The girls like teachers who knew when to approach them for emotional or academic support. It was striking that the girls expected all their teachers to have this intuitive sense. By showing students that you care, and are interested, as well as intuitively able to determine how and when students need specific academic information;

forces the roles and responsibilities of teachers into a broader definition, than just a provider of content knowledge.

d. Fourth Theme: At Times School Seemed Pointless to The Girls

At Times School Seemed Pointless to the Girls. resulted from four of the girls' discussions of uninterested teachers, useless instruction, feeling hopeless, sexist or prejudice attitudes, and feeling powerless or confused about a classroom environment or the teacher's method of instruction . Carmen described one teacher as being "weird towards me", "always like graded me different", or when she asked a question the teacher "wouldn't respond to me the same as she did with the other kids". Rachele spoke of a male teacher "we knew he was joking but we didn't know cause [because] he's a teacher and unless he really did care more about guys than he did about us, why would he say it out loud". It appeared that the girls felt powerless and confused in these classroom environments where students were treated differently. Student motivation is concerned with how students think about themselves in relation to learning activities and to the process of learning itself. Policies and practices in schools send strong messages to students about how success is defined within their walls (Collopy & Green, 1995, p.37). When teachers treated students differently, these girls noticed, and lacked any motivation to learn. It was these classrooms where the at-risk girls identified learning or the teacher as pointless.

Some students display resistance by going through the daily routines of schooling, minimizing their participation in school while displaying an outward conformity of school. According to Giroux (1983), at times students opt for modes of resistance that are quietly subversive (p. 246). Girls in adolescence are at a vulnerable time, creating and recreating their identities as they form their image of themselves and their social

world, including expectations for the future (Hubbard, R.S., Barbierit, M. & Power, B. M., 1998, p. 119). The girls in this study utilized different strategies when exposed to situations where they were not comfortable. The girls either went to another teacher for help, transferred to another class or did not attend class at all. By utilizing these strategies the girls were quietly revolting against the teacher, a form of resistance utilized by the girls. Some of the girls stated that it did not help to complain about the teacher; because they feared complaining would make the situation worse for them.

All of the girls were in agreement and believed that the teacher should ask themselves why students behave the way they do in their specific classroom. Rachele voiced that teachers should ask themselves, “why do students skip their class”. leaving the problem solving and solution up to the teacher. This belief further supports the girls’ belief that all teachers should be intuitive enough to recognize in their students or themselves any changes that need to occur to create a better learning environment. Expanding upon Rachele’s insight, teachers should be encouraged to become attentive to their students’ behaviors in class, question why students are quiet or skip their class. Teachers should also be willing to realize when they need to adjust their teaching techniques to accommodate their students’ needs.

Chapter 3 identified two questions that I pondered throughout the study that connected to feminist literature.

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?

I found that some teachers promote silence in girls as evidenced by those female students who recalled situations where males are treated differently than females. The reason girls

silenced themselves in these classroom environments appeared to be because their teachers kept their distance, were intimidating in class, appeared sexist, and said and did conflicting things. All of these reasons promoted silence in the girls, leading to my third topical sub question:

5.03 Q3 - How will I interpret these themes using a feminist perspective?

The classroom environments that supported social inequalities were the environments that challenged and provided roadblocks for these at-risk female students. The classroom environments that supported equal opportunities, trust, respect and openness were the classrooms that motivated these at-risk girls to learn. It was in these welcoming classrooms that these girls discovered their influential teachers. Those teachers viewed as helpful, willing to talk and intuitive enough to recognize what assistance the at-risk girl needed, and at the correct time that they needed that help were the teachers the girls respected.

It was interesting to hear some of the girls discuss the differences between male and female teachers. Female teachers were seen more as nurturing, caring and willing to ask what the girls considered to be important questions. It appeared important to some of the girls to be allowed to identify to their teacher how they arrived at an answer, or why a specific topic was important to them.

As a female participant in this multiple case study I also asked the why questions. By asking why it pushed the girls to tell me how they felt in specific situations, leading to a more in-depth interview. I felt a strong responsibility to be the voice for these eight at-risk girls. According to Rachele, “the female teachers are more emotional and they are more sensitive to students needs”, compared to male teachers. Rachele also stated that female teachers wait when they ask a question in class to allow everyone the opportunity

to think and respond. It appeared to Rachele that female teachers also ask more than just surface questions, they are interested in how the learned information impacted the students. Reviewing the audio and video tapes I appeared to do what Rachele said female teachers do in some classes. I gave wait time, I asked what does that mean, how do you know, and why do you think that. It was surprising to watch and listen to myself during the interviews because this type of questioning came naturally. These girls were willing to give me more information when I allowed them the opportunity.

Socratic questioning is a technique that could be utilized by both male and female teachers. Asking higher level questions can also promote learning. It may appear that some female teachers naturally ask higher level questions with appropriate wait time for students to respond, simply because of their gender. It would make sense that further research could identify differences in male and female teachers use of questioning techniques in their classrooms. Without additional research, I can only speculate that higher level questioning comes more naturally for some female teachers, because according to these girls, not all of their female teachers allowed for this level of discussion in their classrooms.

The final topical question remains unanswered in this researcher's mind:

5.04 Q4 - How did I guide these females through the process of self-discovery and empowerment from their experiences with teachers?

It is unclear if I guided these females through self-discovery and empowerment after they talked about their experiences with teachers. In examining this final topical sub question I should have directly asked each girl what she discovered after participating in this study. Perhaps this is a question that could also be answered in a future research study.

Recommendations

The theoretical perspective that continued to surface as very useful in this research project focused upon 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 their range of responsibility for students. Teachers who hold on 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 a 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 the present day school organizational setting (Getzels, 1952, p .241). 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). All of the eight at-risk girls in this study appeared to have developed some degree of an affective relationship with a teacher when they moved into secondary schools, and only some experienced an increase in teacher control.

Based upon the data obtained in this multiple case study and the responses of these eight at-risk female participants, I have determined four recommendations.

5.05 Recommendation #1: Teachers should hold to a functionally diffused understanding of their role.

In this study influential teachers were willing to help the girls with intellectual, social, emotional and physical issues. According to the girls, influential teachers remember what brought them to teaching. They remember that students are their main priority. Influential teachers care about every student. The ability of the teacher to read students' signals accurately was necessary if they were to be successful at being socially, emotionally and physically supportive. The girls stated:

Caring is another thing, and if they're caring and they're there then.

obviously they care about teaching, and they care about students. That is a really important quality for teachers to have.

I think teachers should be there for their students, but I think they shouldn't just, you know, wanna [want to] help one student. They should try to help; let all of them know that you are there. And [not just] the ones that are there and want help; but let the others know that they can [get help too].

Mr. (name), he was cool. He could relate to kids. He'd talk to you everyday.

He'd talk to you about things that are going on. He'd talk to you everyday.

He'd ask you about stuff; I mean he was a fun teacher.

There are hazards on the part of the student as well as the teacher when teachers are emotionally supportive. There is no clear line that both groups should not cross. The line is hazy depending upon unique situations. Too much empathizing or caring on the

part of the teacher could cause that teacher to lose his or her perspective with a particular student.

Teachers that hold to a functionally diffused understanding of their role accept a wide range of responsibility for their students. These teachers act as an academic teacher, adult mentor, and a caring listener. Some believe that teachers should deal with student's personal problems and relate to students on an individual basis, while others warn teachers against doing so because of their lack of training. Even among the group of girls there was disagreement about how involved teachers should be with their students. Sonia talked about her preference to go to a counselor or a friend if she had a personal problem; while Carmen did not like "teachers asking her personal questions". The other six girls indicated that teachers should get involved with their students, and be interested in their life problems.

Each of the girls came from divorced families, except for Ginah. Alcohol was also prevalent in Molly and Stasa's lives. Molly's parents were alcoholics, and Stasa talked about her mother partying and being verbally abusive to the children. Stasa did not report that she used alcohol or drugs, but did mention that she used to "do bad things." Additionally, Stasa became pregnant by a fifteen year old boy that was serving time for burglary. She also reported that she ran away from home often. All of the girls that participated in this study had difficult issues that were affecting their adolescent lives, and emotional spirits.

Documented incidences of substance abuse at school were indicated on Carmen's and Sonia's school records. Mia was on parole during the research project, but during the 1999-2000, she did have one incidence of substance abuse and multiple trespassing incidences documented on her school record (see Appendix C: Case Documents

Matrices). Recently, Ginah had an incident with drugs that was documented in the local paper during the summer of 2002. The girls in this study stated that influential teachers care about every student regardless of their reputation. Each students' reputation was built upon what teachers knew of that student. Some teachers knew more about the students' personal life than other teachers. Some of the girls were comfortable with their teachers knowing personal information, while some of the girls were not.

According to a study mentioned in. A Tribe Apart. (Hersch, P., 1999), researchers. Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi and Reed Larson, found adolescents spent only 4.8% of their time with their parents, and only 2% of their time with adults who are not their parents. Based upon Csikzentmihalyi and Larson, they concluded:

Adolescents have learned to become adults by observing, imitating and interacting with grown-ups around them. Not only have adults become separated from their own children, even more importantly, they have gotten separated from the other children in the community. As this happens you have less and less people who might see something to be concerned about, to talk about, and less ability to act collectively to do something about it. It is a problem not just for families but also for communities when the generations get so separated. The effects go beyond issues of rules and discipline to the idea exchanges between generations that do not occur, the conversations not held, the guidance and role modeling not taking place, the wisdom and traditions no longer filtering down inevitably. How can kids imitate and learn from adults if they never talk to them? How can they form the connections to trust adult wisdom if there is inadequate contact? How can they decide what to accept and reject from the previous generation when exposure

is limited? The generational threads that used to weave their way into the fabric of growing up are missing (p. 20).

For the girls that participated in this study there was evidence that they want and desire influential relationships with their teachers. The girls closely watched their teachers when determining if they could accept or reject them as someone they could trust.

Sonia and Ginah were the only girls involved in any extra curricular activities while in high school, which should have provided them opportunities for more adult relationships. Both girls indicated their admiration for the teacher that was in charge of their extra curricular activity. Rachele talked about extra curricular activities as a missed opportunity that she wished she had taken advantage of, but the other girls did not express any interest in becoming involved in sports or clubs while in high school. It is unknown if these girls were not interested in being involved in extra curricular activities because nobody encouraged them to participate, or they were too busy with other activities. This leads to the second recommendation that teachers can not encourage students, if they are not aware of every students' needs in their classroom.

5.06 Recommendation #2: Teachers should be aware of every
 student's sense of being; and be able to recognize
 when to encourage them during their times of need,
 and when to hold back.

The ability to sense students' needs requires intuitive abilities, so that the teacher is sensitive enough to be respectful, supportive, responsible, inclusive and aware of all students' needs. The girls expressed:

They'd be like, let's sit down , and I'll help, and I'd understand it. I wasn't doin [doing] it, and they'd be like, let's sit down, and I'll help. So they'd

sit there and say you're really bright, if you just set your mind to it and read up a little bit.

By encouragin [encouraging] them he (teacher) actually wants them (students) to succeed. Saying hi outside of class. If they talk to you showing their openness, you know, hear what you have to say, as long as I think they are willing to listen to anything, you gotta [have to] say, (I'd) probably be able to trust them.

She'd do the extra things, like you know, come to you, even if you don't [did not] have your hand raised. She'd say how ya [you] [are you] doing? Are you getting through this? Do you understand it?

When other people believe in you it's the greatest feeling!

The third recommendation derived from the previous recommendation in this study. Teachers should be aware of every students' sense of being as well as their own abilities, and when to make changes. Therefore, the third recommendation is:

5.07 Recommendation #3: Teachers should reflect and self-evaluate their own teaching environment; and work toward teaching with their students, not at their students.

Some of the girls indicated that some teachers just throw information at them, not allowing them time to process and understand the information. When teachers are able to focus and know each of their students individually, it may be easier for them to recognize the unique talents and challenges of every student. Asking why students skip their class, or why students do not pay attention or respond in their classes requires teachers to self-reflect, evaluate, accept their own talents, as well as their weaknesses. Teachers should establish relationships with girls through encouraging their academic

interests, or helping them discover their own individual talents. Teachers should compliment girls on their accomplishments that are related to their work in class. These girls did notice when teachers were not honest in their words or actions. These eight at-risk girls watched their teachers closely and formed opinions that affected their achievement performance in class.

When teachers actually sit down and talk to you, and ask you if there is anything they can help you with; it really pushes your self esteem too! To really try hard cause [because] they really wanta [want to] teach us. Female teachers are, well let's get it done; but what did you learn from it? They ask the extra questions that matter, make you think, not just the basic stuff.

Male teachers are, get in, get out, [and] let's get this over with!

Teacher should help you no matter what!

Their teaching ability, you know, they should, [and] they can try to teach to the class; not teach for themselves. Not just sit up there, and talk about things cause [because] that's what they like to learn about things.

Understanding the psychological dimensions and issues of these eight high school girls through discussions and observations allowed the opportunity for my self-discovery. Looking back over the girls' comments about influential teachers, I wondered how these findings and recommendations ultimately influenced teacher training and evaluation. Thus, the final recommendation impacts teacher training.

6.08 Recommendation #4: Universities and school districts must prepare teachers to be intuitive, as well as teach, guide, support and be an ally for students.

Teacher - student relationships are an important component for development and learning in the school setting. Colleges and school districts could provide training for future and current teachers concerning how to enhance their relationships with students, but what about the intuitive side of relationship awareness? The awareness of when to approach and when to hold back with students was critical in developing an influential relationship, as identified by the eight girls in this study.

The ability to train teachers to develop influential relationships with all students is a massive challenge. A teacher can have a positive or negative impact on a student's future attitude, behavior and relationship development. Are we able to train and evaluate teachers so that they will have skills necessary to establish influential relationships with all of their students, is a question to be answered by future research.

The eight at-risk girls in this multiple case study presented themselves to this researcher as complex creatures. The challenge of this study was to act as their voice while providing a clear and accurate picture of their attitudes, thoughts and beliefs about influential teacher relationships. The self-reflexiveness that surfaced during this study solidified this female researcher's efforts to continue my quest to provide a secure place for all children to learn.

Suggestions For Future Research

This study focused on eight at-risk high school girls and the teachers they viewed as influential. The data presented in this study only provided the perspective of eight at-risk high school females. Based upon the information gained from this research project there are two recommendations for future research.

5.09 Research Suggestion #1: To fully understand teachers and students in a more in-depth fashion, additional research should

be directed toward qualitative methods within the same topical area.

Researchers have gained some knowledge about teacher relationships from survey methods, but unless time is given to provide students and teachers the opportunity to sit down together to tell their stories, we will not fully understand the dynamics of teacher - student relationships.

5.10 Research Suggestion #2: How teachers view their role is the second suggestion for researchers to gather more data in both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The psycho-sociological concept of functionally diffuse and functionally specific role relationships in teaching could be researched in conjunction with student achievement. Looking historically at the role of teachers and achievement patterns could also be helpful in establishing new criteria for teacher education programs for colleges and universities.

A 1992 report, A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Non school Hours, published by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development identified;

About 40% of adolescents' waking hours are spent in discretionary activities - not committed to other activities [such as eating, school, homework, chores, or working for pay]. Many young people spend virtually all of their discretionary time without companionship or supervision by responsible adults. If eating, homework and chores are done without adults present, over half of adolescents' time could easily be spent on their own (Hersch, P., 1999, p. 21).

In thinking about this 1992 report, at-risk students critically need positive adult role models in their lives. This study focused on the relationship of eight at-risk high

school female students, and the teachers they considered influential. Each girl shared their unique idea of an influential teacher. The girls in this study were identified by their school as being at-risk. After interviewing these girls I would concur that each was at-risk, based upon a combination of home and school issues. According to Pianta & Walsh (1996), "Social processes regulate how risk develops and ultimately becomes manifest in a child's adaptation to school" (p. 156). The girls in this study only adapted to school in some classrooms. Schools cannot change society or the experiences that these eight at-risk girls endured. What schools can change is the number of opportunities at-risk girls experience influential relationships in school by continuing to study teacher-student phenomenon.

5.11 Research Suggestion #3: To further understand the phenomenon of relationships with adolescents this study should be replicated with at-risk boys.

Some of the girls in this study talked about the differences between male and female teachers. Rachele especially noted differences in the ways males and females question students during instructional times. The girls talked about relationships with male and female teachers in different intensities. It would be helpful to teachers to have a more complete picture of gender differences and how it impacts student-teacher relationships in the classroom. When these girls entered their classrooms they encountered teachers, who like themselves had unique experiences that shaped them as individuals.

Data was gathered in this study to determine to what extent teacher are perceived as influential adults by at-risk girls. Even though many teachers are dedicated to their work and care for the children that they teach; it was alarming in this study the number

of times these girls identified situations where they perceived that they were not cared about in school. When these girls came to school they encountered experiences that either increased or decreased their risks. The different teachers that these girls' described had common behaviors of encouragement, friendship and used caring words. Six of the girls talked about their excitement in attending classes where they felt respected, included and important. Alarming, six of the girls also talked about classes where they felt hopeless, frustrated, gender differences and unimportant. Additional in-depth research on the at-risk population could allow educators continued data and possibly more answers to how to best meet the academic and emotional needs of this challenging population.