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What Happens to Girls When They Are the only Female in a Male Dominated Setting?

Nancy Courtney Mitchell

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WHAT HAPPENS TO GIRLS WHEN THEY ARE THE ONLY 
FEMALE IN A MALE DOMINATED SETTING?

by

NANCY C. MITCHELL

(Under the Direction of Grigory Dmitriyev)

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of special education and particularly since the induction of Public Law 94-142, special educational practices have placed a significantly greater number of boys than girls in classes for children with learning disabilities and emotional/behavioral disorders. As a result, there is often only one girl per class of modified self-contained students – spending at least three periods per day in a setting set aside for their unique characteristics and needs. The marginalization of this group of females is a cause for concern, especially in times when gender equities are at the forefront of much of the recent public discussions, scholarly research, and social practices in which females with disabilities are still not paid the attention they deserve and need. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to try to determine what consequences “being the only girl in class” have on these girls academically and socially. Females with disabilities require additional attention as opposed to their general education peers because they tend to experience a greater sense of alienation, normlessness, and powerlessness along with a lower self-esteem. Consequently, this group of females often suffers a higher rate of depression, more experiences of rejection and failure, lack of self-confidence, and a diminished sense of pride (Shoho & Katims, 1997). Having a disability and being female manifests itself through unemployment, poverty, and premature pregnancy placing these
young women at greater risks than their peers without disabilities (Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001). The results of this study assisted in focusing the attention of educators, politicians, and lay citizens on this population and narrowing the substantial gap in current literature on the academic and social effects of being female in male-dominated special education classes most of the school day. It was conducted in a high school in South Fulton County, Georgia targeting four female students who were interviewed in depth one-on-one and formally observed which assisted in revealing emerging themes or commonalities among this set of individuals. Females with disabilities have been a neglected group for too many years and deserve to have their stories heard and their challenges recognized.

INDEX WORDS: Specific learning disabilities, Emotional/Behavioral disorders, Other health impairment, Feminism, Phenomenological inquiry, Academic performance
WHAT HAPPENS TO GIRLS WHEN THEY ARE THE ONLY FEMALE IN A MALE DOMINATED SETTING?

by

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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WHAT HAPPENS TO GIRLS WHEN THEY ARE THE ONLY FEMALE IN A MALE DOMINATED SETTING?

by

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Major Professor: Grigory Dmitriyev
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Margaret LaMontagne
Joyce Bergin

Electronic Version Approved:
May 2006
DEDICATION

God has truly blessed me with so many wonderful caring people in my life. This is dedicated to all my family and friends who constantly encouraged and supported me with tireless efforts throughout this endeavor. Only those closest to me know the extent of my determination and struggle while completing this project. For that and so much more, I thank you!

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teachers. You instilled in me your unyielding work ethic, the desire for a quality of life
made possible through hard work and determination, and the means to make my dreams
come true. You are my heroes!

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“It doesn’t matter how long we may have been stuck in a sense of our limitations. If we go into a darkened room and turn on the light, it doesn’t matter if the room has been dark for a day, or a week, or even ten thousand years – we turn on the light and it is illumined.”
  - Sharon Salzberg

Overview

This proposed research was a qualitative study of females currently placed in high school special education programs in Fulton County, Georgia. The girls in this study have moderate to severe learning disabilities and/or emotional behavior disorders, receive services three or more periods per day, and like most girls in special education across Georgia and the United States spend most of their day in a male-dominated setting, often times being the only female in their academic classes. I came to this study with three main questions: What effects does the phenomenon of being in such a minority have on the females’ academic performance? What are the possible effects these experiences have on the development of their socialization skills? What themes may emerge from the girls’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences about their consciousness of being “the only girl in class?” The intended research served to explore what effects this trend has on females’ academic performance and their socialization skills as well as to identify any emerging themes that may be relevant for future research. This study also described their experiences in a manner that would be beneficial and enlightening to them and to significant others - personal and professional. Finally, the research assisted in closing a gap of knowledge that largely focuses on the overabundance of males placed in special education rather than females with disabilities.
Statement of Problem

Several authors report that in high schools, approximately two-thirds to three-fourths of students receiving special education services are boys (Wehmeyer, 2001; Ravitch, 1996; Bushweller, 1995). Within the U.S. Department of Education, The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is funding a multitude of studies trying to determine the successfulness of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). One such study is SEELS - The Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study of six years (1999-2005) that will attempt to document the school experiences of students with disabilities as they move from elementary to middle school and then from middle school to high school. While conducting this research, OSEP reported similar results for grades one through eight: two-thirds of the special education population is males crossing all racial/ethnic groups. That leaves anywhere between 25 % - 33% of the special education population (females) to be dispersed into classes where they are, by far, the minority, often times ending up being the only girl in class. In my school alone (a high school within Fulton County, Georgia) there are approximately 152 males to 46 females with moderate to severe learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavior disorders being served three or more periods per day. Each class’s maximum number is eight and practically every class is comprised of 6-7 boys and 1-2 girls, with two being the greatest number of females in any of the classes - and that occurrence being very uncommon.

In general, females experience a rather difficult time growing up in an environment where society largely is unconcerned with their success or fails to give credence to their distinctive attributes, but to do so without a support group of same sex classmates can be even more challenging and perhaps slightly intimidating. It has been
documented that as early as preschool that children prefer to interact with peers of the same sex (Lafreniere, Strayer, & Gauthier, 1984; Maccoby, 1988). It is believed that the reasons are that girls and boys have different types of socialization skills, boys were less likely to listen to girls than girls would be willing to listen to boys (Maccoby, 1990), and that boys are more dominant than girls (Omark & Edelman, 1975). Studies conducted by Serbin, Moller, Gulko, Powlishta, and Colburne (1994) found that as early as preschool, girls are perhaps hesitant to express their own thoughts, feelings, and exhibit certain behaviors in front of peers of the opposite sex.

Education in the United States today is largely dependent upon the group or group-centered activities. While there may be several positive results of being part of a group such as sharing of ideas, learning to cooperate, and working successfully toward a common goal, when a female student is in the minority, she may feel inhibited to freely communicate her needs, thoughts, or aspirations (Gutek, 1997).

As Wrigley (1992) pointed out in her book, *Education and Gender Equality*, females often pay a price if they dare break traditional gender roles, are too assertive, too ambitious, or “act out” in a manner that could be construed as immoral. There exist definite gender expectations in our society as well as in the educational environment. In the past, females have not been persuaded to take certain courses in school because it was not considered feminine or proper, for instance: horticulture, auto mechanics, and JROTC. In addition, advanced math and science courses have not typically been “offered” to as many girls as they are to boys and numerous careers are still considered to be predominately male oriented. Rich (1979) stated it best as she spoke to a group of young college women on *claiming* an education rather than *receiving* one. She said,
“Responsibility means that you refuse to sell your talents and aspirations short, simply to avoid conflict and confrontation. And this in turn means resisting forces in society which say that women should be nice, play safe, have low professional expectations, drown in love and forget about work, live through others, and stay in the places assigned to us” (pp.233-234).

Rich practically begs women to take responsibility for their lives by taking charge of their education and to reject the stereotypical representations of what others think she should do or become.

We currently live in a society that is indifferent toward females’ success, autonomy, or their right to live in a world that recognizes and appreciates their unique characteristics. Qualities normally thought to be feminine in nature such as mild-mannered, compassionate, nurturing, cooperative, and caring, are diminished by our culture and what is even more dangerous is that, in turn, females begin to view themselves as undeserving and rely on others to determine their worthiness. Ironically, this endorsement or validation comes from the men in their life such as fathers, loving partners, and/or husbands. Consequently, girls’ self-esteem can suffer, making them feel devalued by society, less worthy than their male counterparts, and unable to take necessary risks in order to be independent and successful (Orenstein, 1994).

In addition, females with moderate to severe disabilities tend to have lower self-esteem more than their peers without disabilities. Shoho & Katims (1997) reported that students who are served through a modified self-contained program (3 or more periods a day) suffer a greater sense of alienation, normlessness, and powerlessness. Students who feel alienated have a tendency to separate themselves from groups, therefore, not pursuing or forming relationships with their peers. They also believed that they were not part of the “norm” and were perceived as different from their classmates and thus
alienating themselves even further. Students with disabilities also were reported as having feelings of powerlessness, and rather than trying harder at a task, they gave up before a true effort was attempted. Students who consider themselves as powerless are likely to rationalize any effort to achieve or belong as a wasted effort or useless altogether (Shoho & Katims, 1997). In addition, students with learning disabilities often suffer from depression, and experience rejection, failure, and humiliation resulting in a lack of confidence, low self-esteem, and a diminished sense of pride (Orenstein, 1994).

Females with disabilities are at double disadvantage for low self-worth, loss of voice, and limitations imposed by society simply because they are female living in a patriarchal world. Having a disability and female puts these girls at further risk and places them in double jeopardy for living in poverty, being unemployed, dropping out of school, and/or becoming prematurely pregnant (Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001). Several studies in the past twenty years have reported conclusive evidence that females with disabilities have not done nearly as well in post secondary education, training or in phases of employment as their male peers and that they often receive lower wages when employed (Scuccionarra & Speece, 1990; Sitlington & Frank, 1990; Wagner, 1993).

As a twenty-three year veteran in the field of special education, I can affirm that this trend in special education of teaching females in a male-dominated setting is abundant across additional districts and at various levels. I have taught at several different schools and at all levels (elementary, junior high, middle, and high school), and my experience is much the same as mentioned in the previous section. I have had some classes with only boys but the majority of my classes for all twenty three years usually had one girl in each class and the rare exception being two girls per class. I have often
wondered how they must feel and what they experience going through their school day being “the only girl in class.” These dynamics must undoubtedly have an affect on females with disabilities. This study helped enhance educators’ knowledge about the effects this phenomenon has on young women and how schools can best assist them in pursuing and receiving an equitable education in a domain where they are, by far, the minority. In addition, this research can serve as a means for educators, administrators, and politicians to help improve educational practices for females with disabilities.

Purpose

The main purpose of this research was to investigate experiences of females who are placed in a male dominated setting most of the school day and the effects it may have on their academic performance and social development. Analyzed data can give theorists and practitioners insight to the costs these girls are paying for being part of such a marginalized and often overlooked group of individuals. Positive consequences that may emerge will be used in an attempt to assist these and other young women in their same set of circumstances. An additional purpose for conducting this study was to explore ways to encourage females to take more of an active role in their education, empower them to make choices that will benefit them more directly, make them more self-reliant, and better prepare them for life after high school.

Academic performance was determined by the students’ perceptions of their ability and success, how many classes they are passing, credits they have attained and to what degree they are on track for graduation. Another way in which academic performance was decided was evaluate the extent of plans made for success after high school and measures taken to reach those intended goals such as career planning and
occupational awareness classes. Their motivational level in completing their goals was also addressed.

The presence or development of appropriate social skills is vital to one’s academic performance and for success in most endeavors. Research shows that in order to be effective decision makers, critical thinkers, and successful problem solvers, students must possess and display appropriate social skills. Negative results of having poor social skills can cause children to be rejected by their peers, be ineffective problem solvers, and in general, be unprepared to meet academic challenges (Milson, 2002). These are just a few of the reasons why this study’s purpose was to examine the effects of being in such a minority had on this group of females.

Social development or appropriate socialization is usually judged by how a person conducts themselves on a daily basis particularly when faced with adverse situations or under uncomfortable conditions. Granted some females may enjoy being the only girl in class and there could be some benefits, but being placed in such a minority most of the school day could require an advanced hierarchy of social development of which many teenagers do not possess and this is especially true for special education students (Asher, 1990).

They are already at double jeopardy with their unique set of circumstances of being female and struggling with learning disabilities or emotional/behavior disorders. This study was essential in order to comprehend the plight of these young women, to explore how females with disabilities are coping with their immediate environment, and to assess how their needs are being met, academically and socially. This research needed to be conducted so they could have their stories told, and their challenges recognized.
Hypothesis

I hypothesized that being one of the few or the only girl in class for the majority of the day, had challenging effects for each individual. Anytime someone is in the minority, certain consequences take place, whether they are construed as positive or negative consequences. By listening to the stories these young women with disabilities had to tell and analyzing emergent themes that surfaced during the scope of this study results will hopefully reveal how and to what degree they are affected by this phenomenon of being “the only girl in class” and ways to address the consequences.

Research Questions

The research questions to be answered by carrying out this proposal were:

1) How does being in a male-dominated setting most of the school day affect girls’ academic performance?

2) How does being in a male-dominated program affect girls’ socialization skills?

3) What themes to be outlined for further research may possibly emerge from the girls’ thoughts, descriptions, and feelings about their awareness of being “the only girl in class” in special education classes?

Potential Significance

Based on the research cited earlier on females being such a small proportion of the special education population, (Wehmeyer, 2001; Ravitch, 1996; Bushwell, 1995; Bailey, 1993) and only sprinkled in classrooms for students with disabilities, the extent to which their self-esteem already pales in comparison with their peers without disabilities, (Shoho & Katims, 1997) and the danger of being placed in double jeopardy for being
poor, unemployed, high-school dropouts, and teenaged moms, (Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001) the potential significance for this study was evident. Referring mostly boys for special services and/or serving mainly the male population has to be detrimental to the group of girls preparing for life in classes predominately occupied by the male gender. Females have far too long accepted what has been “dished out” by a male-dominated society and have had limited power when it came to their goals, education, and choices in career. Therefore, this research could possibly enlighten educators and contribute to school systems’ reevaluating their method of scheduling, and to be more informed of current practices, as they exist today. It could also serve as a catalyst for young women to understand that it is acceptable and even imperative that they are aware and speak out on issues that directly affect them, especially when it comes to their education and preparation for a quality life.

This phenomenon is so widespread; it is highly likely that these young women do not even realize they are being hindered in any manner. Students with moderate to severe disabilities have usually attended special education classes since elementary school since this is when the majority of referrals and placements are made. Females most likely perceive this as the norm, therefore never even conceptualizing that there is a need for their liberation. By bringing this issue to the forefront and starting a dialogue on the subject, these females can begin to free themselves from their past and current practices that have assisted in perpetuating the status quo. Freire (1970), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* speaks of reducing domination through dialogue and love. He states:

“Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of profound love for the world and for women and men… Because love is an act of courage, not fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is
commitment to their cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. (p. 142).

Educators must be a viable ally and leaders in promoting freedom in all individuals and support their endeavors in becoming healthy, responsible, and self-reliant. However, freedom can only be attained when the realization takes place that there are stumbling blocks that gets in our way and must be moved or crushed. As Greene (1988) so adequately stated in *The Dialectic of Freedom* (1988), “If one does not understand the obstacle or recognize it as an impediment, or if one simply does not care, then genuine freedom is not possible” (p. 5).

**Limitations**

There were expected limitations to this study. First, the subject size will only be limited to four young women. They are from one general area and all attend high school, grades nine through twelve. The high school chosen will be in a county in the northwestern part of Georgia.

Secondly, the results could be limited due to the bias of the researcher. A feminist, the researcher has strong views on feminism and the roles girls should play in their school career and in preparation for life outside of high school. The researcher has also been a special education teacher for over 20 years and has seen this phenomenon take place over the course of her career. These biases are recognized and were attempted to be addressed through additional research. Still, it was the researcher’s intent to carry out this study with as little prejudice as possible by examining all emerging themes that exposed themselves, whether they were interpreted as positive or negative effects of this phenomenon.
Finally, an additional limitation may have been in the design, which was phenomenological in nature. This design alone lends itself more to interpretative results rather than results that can be broadly generalized. Since the research study was interested in the school lives of females with disabilities, their lived experiences were interpreted and described by the researcher, which may have fallen short of fully revealing their meaning when their stories were told (van Manen, 1990, as cited in Ferch, 2000).

Terminology

*Specific Learning Disabilities* is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken, or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and development aphasia (IDEA ’97 Regulations).

*Emotional/Behavioral Disorders* is defined as a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. These characteristics are as follows: an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or other health factors, an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and a tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains, or fears associated with personal or school problems (IDEA ’97 Final Regulations).
*Other Health Impairment* means having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli that result in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment. It is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, and sickle cell anemia; and adversely affects a child’s educational performance (IDEA ’97 Final Regulations).

*Feminism* can be defined as both a theory and explanation of women’s position in a society and a political statement focused on gaining equal rights and opportunities for women on changing power relations between men and women (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999).

*Phenomenological Inquiry* is a form of interpretive inquiry that focuses on human perception, particularly on the aesthetic qualities of human experience and results in descriptions of personal lived experiences (Willis as cited in Short, 1991, pp. 173 & 175).

*Academic performance* for the purposes of this study will be defined by the students’ perceptions of their ability and success, how many classes they are passing, credits they have attained and to what degree they are on track for graduation.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature took a look at background information and current practices in the field of mental health and special education concerning the phenomenon of overabundance of males in special education, the small quantity of females in special education classes and suggested reasons why, and the possible effect(s) such a trend may have on these females with identified learning and/or emotional/behavioral problems who spend the most of their day in a male dominated setting. The review also investigated how females, in general, have been neglected, especially in the school system, and the additional impact this could have on females with disabilities. Implications for further research and practice in this area were also explored to fill in the gap of knowledge about this category of schoolgirls. An additional section focused on critics who believe that females have caught up to the achievement of boys and in some cases even surpassed their success in school and in life and that boys should be the primary focus of current research.

When conception takes place the ratio between boys and girls is approximately 120-135 males to every 100 females (Bentzen, 1966 & Eme, 1984), although, by the time they are born, the proportion is much closer with a ratio of 105 males to each 100 females (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). Then by school age, the difference in the male to female ratio is basically even (Stockard, 1980). Nevertheless, in spite of these dynamics, there are higher male-dominated percentages in practically every special education classroom across the country. It has also been noted that along with the identification of certain handicapping conditions, other disabilities are found to be more prevalent in boys,
such as speech and language disorders, conduct disorders, attention deficit disorders (which are often served in special education programs), and juvenile delinquency (Bentzen, 1966; Eme, 1984; & Mumpower, 1970). In addition, a collection of researchers (Hayden-McPeak, Gaskin, & Gaughan, 1993; Jennings, Mendelson, May, & Brown, 1988; & Stockard, 1980) found that the male to female ratios could range anywhere between 3:1 to 25:1 for students with Learning Disabilities and Emotional/ Behavior Disorders.

Bailey (1993) and the U.S. Department of Education (1992) reported that special education classrooms across the United States have higher ratios of boys to girls between 2:1 and 3:1. Included in these numbers are students categorized with Other Health Impairments who are often served in classes for students with Learning Disabilities (IDEA ’97 Final Regulations). Goldstein (2002) revealed that boys were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder at a ratio of three boys for every girl identified while Nadeau (2002) reports numbers closer to four to five boys per one girl. Butler and Kratz’s research (2000) found that boys outnumber girls six to one with Attention Deficit Disorder and four to one with an Emotional/ Behavioral Disorder. Wehmeyer (2001) noted that 73% of students with Learning Disabilities were boys and 76% of high school students with Severe Emotional/Behavior Disorders were male and that every other category of special education was disproportionately male except for the categories of deafness and blindness. Hulnick (1999) reported that experts at one time even believed the numbers were much greater than recently reported, citing a ratio of ten boys to every one girl who were diagnosed with a learning disability. This practice of overrepresentation of boys not only occurs rampantly in the school system, but also
in non-school settings such as mental health centers, public hospitals, private mental facilities, and out patient clinics (Pearcy & Clopton, 1993; Eme 1984; & Gove, 1979).

Identifying sex ratios was a rather easy task, however, making a determination as to why the practice of referring more boys than girls for assessment is not as simple to figure. One researcher, Callahan (1994), offered several possible rationales for why this trend is so prevalent. The first reason he offered was one of a biological and/or physiological nature and centers around the differences in brain structures, hormonal and cognitive differences, and maturation levels that may cause girls and boys to act in different ways or learn at varied paces; therefore being referred for treatment at different rates. Gove (1979) asserted that one of the biggest problems plaguing boys is the expectation that they act and perform the same as girls when it is clear that they develop at a slower pace intellectually and physically. In addition, boys tend to be more aggressive than girls and are repeatedly referred for this type of behavior when it is exhibited in the school setting. Achenbach, Howell, Quay, and Conners (1991), contend that boys have more visible, acting out behaviors such as conduct disorders and attention deficit disorders, and girls’ problems tend to be more introverted in nature such as depression and anxiety. Therefore, teachers and parents frequently “see” boys as having the most radical type behaviors and tend to refer them for special services such as emotional/behavior disorders quicker than they would girls’ experiencing internal types of problems.

Social and cultural explanations could be another reason boys are referred at a higher rate than girls. Research indicates that sex differences occur as early as birth when parents have more of a tendency to respond to a crying female child before responding to
a male who is displaying the same type of behavior (Hayden-McPeak, Gaskin, & Gaughan, 1993). Boys are also thought to be rougher than girls and should act accordingly, whereas, society has typically viewed girls as petite and feminine, and expects them to conduct themselves in an equivalent fashion.

A third possible cause of boys being over represented in special education might be the manner in which they interact with teachers, especially since teachers are usually the ones who initiate the referral process. Overall, research has shown that teachers treat boys differently than they do girls. Martin (1972) claimed that all boys’ behavior attracts the teachers’ attention, whether it is positive or negative. Teachers reported that boys are usually more taxing than girls, more argumentative, get into more fights, and are normally more rebellious, bigger bullies, and display fewer manners. Girls, on the other hand, are typically more responsible, more obedient, and respectful of authority figures. Girls also typically receive better grades than boys although their level of intelligence is not notably higher nor is their curriculum usually as stringent as boys (Gove, 1979).

Further research supports that the referring teacher’s role is crucial when considering who is to be tested for special education services. Between three and five percent of the school aged population is referred for special education services and approximately 75% are found eligible and eventually placed into special classes. Most students referred for services usually have a lower than average reading level but biases still exist according to a student’s willingness to learn and teachers’ attitudes in teaching “difficult students.” Research has shown that educators who are considered the most successful tend to have a lower tolerance for students with behavioral or learning problems and although students with these type problems could highly benefit from such
teachers, they often times end up in pull out programs for part of the day, and if their problems do not show marked improvement over a certain period of time, they may eventually be placed in a more restrictive environment (Hocutt, 1996).

Additional research conducted by Weymeher (2001) supported the fact that boys are over represented in the special education population and offered likely reasons why this occurs. The first of three main findings for this phenomenon were to biological factors since boys are more vulnerable to certain genetic disorders and more susceptible to having a learning disability. Additionally, girls in general, have less birth defects and they mature at a faster pace thereby usually exhibiting more socially acceptable behaviors (Halpern, 1992). Secondly, since boys appear more energetic, their “energy” may be misconstrued as misconduct when observed in the school setting even though this type of behavior is expected and even encouraged. Girls, on the other hand, are persuaded to act less aggressively by displaying behaviors that can be categorized as quiet, passive, agreeable, and polite. The third result of the findings was the possibility for teachers to have hidden prejudices when it comes to the referral, assessment, and review of students considered “at-risk.” Besides having certain biases, teachers’ perceptions are crucial when considering placement outside the mainstream. Male teachers may perceive that “boys are acting like boys,” while female teachers may have a totally different perception. Furthermore female teachers’ may observe irregular behaviors in girls that men do not consider questionable. Teachers’ perceptions, biases, and experiences all play a role when referring and evaluating students for special education and since the majority of teachers are women, especially in the elementary grades where most referrals originate, biases could be compounded (Wehmeyer, 2001).
Several researchers contend that boys are not overly diagnosed or placed in special education classes in greater numbers but that girls are simply undiagnosed since they do not exhibit the same type of acting out behaviors as boys and therefore are typically disregarded for the initial referral process. For example, Goldstein (2002) reported that even though boys are identified at a rate of 3:1 for Attention Deficit Disorder, several girls also demonstrated some of the same behaviors as boys. The report further stated that girls are more inclined to display symptoms of inattentiveness as opposed to impulsiveness – the characteristic that boys usually exhibit more often. Since inattentiveness is considered a more covert type of behavior and impulsiveness usually manifests itself through acting out, these behaviors are much more visible, and, as a result, are recognized by parents and teachers more often as being out of the norm, or inappropriate, particularly in the school setting.

Hulnick (1999) reported that specialists in the field are beginning to recognize that no longer does the male student make up the enormous disparity of students identified with learning disabilities. Previously, statistics have shown that in most environments, boys outnumber girls as high as 10:1 in special programs but that the actual numbers of students with disabilities are practically even. However, referrals and evaluations continue to be much higher for boys since they are more likely to demonstrate outward signs of frustration on academic assignments than girls and at an earlier age – usually in primary grades, especially on assignments centered on language. This type of behavior tends to grab the teacher's attention while girls with the same type of learning problems may hide their frustration and exhibit more teacher-friendly behaviors such as being helpful and cooperative to compensate for their
inadequacies and, as a result, difficulties may not expose themselves until later grades when teachers and/or parents may determine as if it is “too late” to address or to rectify. The girls themselves may even fight to have their disability revealed if it is not discovered until middle or high school (Hulnick, 1999).

Nadeau (2002) agreed that the number of girls with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) may be closer to that of boys but, once again, are not referred or diagnosed nowhere near the same frequency as boys. One reason that this may occur, she suggested, was that several checklists use stress behaviors that are commonly found in boys with ADD – behaviors that center around hyperactivity and impulsivity. Current research suggests that a majority of females are slipping through the cracks because their mannerisms differ from the present mind set of what it means to have ADD – male or female.

Pleasing type behavior is what ironically is creating such a deficit in the number of recommendations for assessment of females with suspected ADD. They normally appear less unruly than boys, less disobedient, and in general, less trouble. When boys display inappropriate behaviors, they receive a great deal attention from parents and teachers. When traditional methods to correct behavior do not work, assistance is often sought in the way of referrals to psychologists, mental health services, and/or special education. When a girl displays a style of behaviors normally thought to be typical of the male child with ADD, she frequently gets overlooked or excuses are offered to explain her behavior (Nadeau, 2002).

There are three common “excuses” educators and parents may offer as reasons for a female’s behavior other than suspected ADD noted in the literature. Their first “excuse”
offered for a female’s questionable behavior is that maybe she’s just a “Tomboy.” Girls who are more energetic than other girls, like to be involved in more outdoor activities, or regularly participate in sports may earn the reputation of being a “tomboy.” The main difference observed between hyperactive boys and hyperactive girls is their attitude in the home and school setting. Girls usually are more obliging and try harder to please the adults in their immediate environment; however, they are just as likely to have cluttered surroundings such as their room or book bag and are notably disorganized as well. These girls’ actions are usually attributed to their tomboyish nature – giving their behavior acceptance and validity rather than suspicion for any disability (Nadeau, 2002).

The second “excuse” or reasonable assumption why a female’s ADD may be overlooked is she may simply be a daydreamer. Girls who are distracted easily or appear not to be paying attention at times may become known as daydreamers; they usually are quiet, try not to call attention to themselves, have wandering minds, and are commonly disregarded by those who initiate referrals for ADD, learning difficulties, behavioral concerns, or special education services. These girls are disorganized also and may be even considered scatter brained. They have difficulty getting assignments completed and become anxious when due dates materialize but still face barriers in getting them finished without constant prompting. Going unnoticed by parents or school officials, these girls may end up displaying symptoms of depression; appear less intelligent as their grade level peers, and are often the ones who “fall between the cracks” and receive no type of special attention – placing them further “at risk” (Nadeau, 2002).

The “Chatty Kathy” syndrome was the third kind of “excuse” offered for ADD symptoms in females rather than admitting a disability exists. This sort of female often
appears as if she can never stop talking, can be extremely silly, and even ditzy in nature. She may be referred to as “blond” no matter her hair color or skin tone. She usually gets into trouble during class for talking too much and paying attention too little – even with threats of discipline action. The girls’ thoughts emerge as jumbled and they may switch from topic to topic without warning. They may be the popular girls in school who are energetic, vivacious, and very outgoing. When their academic problems become too complex, they may begin to camouflage their difficulties through actions of a delinquent nature such as truancy, smoking, drinking, and promiscuity (Nadeau, 2002).

All these girls may be described differently but the results are often the same. They have symptoms that can be attributed to an Attention Deficit Disorder and lack of proper identification and management can cause this group of schoolgirls damaging side effects in and out of school. Their low self-esteem can lead to feelings of unworthiness, or they may feel as if they are less intelligent than their age level peers with less talent or creativity. Parents and teachers alike may simply regard them as lazy and unmotivated leading them to doubt their own capability which is probably the most damaging effect. (Nadeau, 2002).

While various physiological and environmental causes have been cited in the literature to explain the inconsistent and profuse manner in which boys and girls are referred and placed in special education, few proposals on how to alleviate this practice have been identified. First of all, it is not being advocated that there be an equal amount of boys and girls in special education (Wehmeyer, 2001) but that all children who are eligible for services be served (Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001). Secondly, readers need to be aware that special education is not a magic potion wherein all who enter will be cured.
Third, although, unequal sex ratios are evident by the small percentage of females in special education, there has been a limited amount of research on the subject, therefore generalizations are hard to recognize at this time (Grossman, 2002). Other researchers make the same claim about overgeneralizations with females of color, lesbian and bisexual females, girls from low-income families, and girls who relocate to the United States from other countries. They contend that these girls have been silenced not only in society but also from the current research (Ohye & Daniel, 1999 & Reid, 1999). Studies on voice alone are in primary stages but research on being female and multicultural is relatively nonexistent (Iglesias & Corimer, 2002).

Teenaged girls are already in danger of becoming progressively silent as they move through adolescence whereby experiencing serious problems that come with not having the confidence to speak out about various issues - issues that could have direct consequences on their proper development. Girls from diverse backgrounds view themselves in unique manners suffering different types of losses but still unnecessary. Losses adolescent girls experience can usually be placed in four major categories: emotional, physical, educational, and behavioral losses (Iglesias & Corimer, 2002).

Emotional losses can manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Female students time and again spend the first part of their lives, from elementary school through college, learning the deafening lesson of silence and then spend the next segment of their lives trying to regain it – some never do. As females begin to regain their voice, they may do so with caution; hiding true feelings, doubting their beliefs, or holding back opinions to avoid conflict (a quality associated with being a “proper female”), and masking their intelligence (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).
Additional research showed that while Latina and White American girls are less likely to show feelings of anger, African American girls have more trouble expressing sadness or pain (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Either way, not feeling at ease to express these types of feelings can result in poor health, physically and mentally. Pent-up anger can lead to disease such as high blood pressure, tension headaches, or much more serious illnesses such as strokes and heart attacks (hooks, 1992). Unexpressed anger can also lead to depression, which in turn, can be the catalyst for higher rates of drug abuse in girls than in boys (Reinherz, Frost, & Pakiz, 1990), less educational success, more family problems, frequent feelings of loneliness or seclusion, and lower self-esteem (Fleming & Offord, 1990; Reinherz et al., 1990). These behaviors do not necessarily end with adolescence. Jack (1991) found in a study of adult White women that depression usually continues throughout adulthood. These women reported feeling as if they had no voice in personal relationships, and as a result, oftentimes felt vulnerable and helpless deepening the feelings of depression even further. African American women had less trouble expressing anger but experienced problems communicating emotions of grief and pain stating that female relatives, particularly their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts, advocated the need to be strong self-sufficient women. In essence this meant that feelings of pain and suffering were to be either silenced or ignored altogether and a total denial of who they were or who they could become (Taylor, et al., 1995).

In Brown and Gilligan’s study, Meeting at the Crossroads (1992), they found that White middle class girls of beginning high school age had a tendency to become increasingly silent and even shut down to the point where they appeared detached even from themselves. In 1995, another study was conducted with girls of the same age but
from low income families and of varying descents. The results were different in the fact that these girls didn’t shut down as much nor feel as disconnected but did suffer consequences none the less. This group of females felt as if they had to fend for themselves, be stronger than the other girls, and was often labeled as problem children when they refused to be silent. Consequently, several students ended up dropping out of school, becoming teenaged moms, and often earning lower wages than their peers (Taylor, et al., 1995).

Physical losses among teenaged girls usually transform themselves in matters of physical beauty and overall attractiveness in modern day society, particularly American society, as reported in 1992 by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), an association that helps encourage educational equality for girls and women alike. White teenaged girls are commonly more apprehensive about their bodies and tend to be more critical of their overall looks than girls of color but that number is on the rise evident by the reported incidents of eating disorders among this group of young women (Kalodner, 1996). Girls learn at an early age about the impact of body image in today’s culture and several feel dissatisfied with their bodies by the age of six years old and statistics show that approximately 80% of ten year old girls have already been on some form of diet. Dieting taken to the extreme in the appearance of anorexia nervosa usually climax in females around age twelve and then again at age seventeen. This type of eating disorder has the deadliest effect than any other psychiatric disorder and fatally wounds 20% of its victims (Butler & Kratz, 2000). Overall, eating disorders, anorexia nervosa, and bulimia, affect girls nine times more often than they do boys, once again
showing an intense and sometimes deadly concern over physical attributes (Girls Report, 2005).

Girls with disabilities may feel less adequate intellectually or socially and make up for their perceived inadequacies by becoming overly concerned with their physical appearance. While standards and the overall scrutiny in the United States concerning females’ physical beauty and size may be seen as repressive and exploitive, several young women of other ethnicities who have a strong desire to become mainstreamed into American culture tend to take on American society’s view of what is considered attractive and desirable, separating themselves more from their own culture and ideals which can silence them even further (Harris & Kuba, 1997). There are several teenaged girls, however, who remain loyal to their primary culture and maintain their cultures idea of what makes women beautiful (Iglesias & Corimer, 2002).

Physical losses also come in the form of sexuality and desire and the lack of dialogue about this subject matter. All females need an open channel of communication on this topic since females who experience low self-esteem too often participate in sex and sexual activities at a very early age. Lesbian and bisexual females are challenged even further since the acceptance level regarding these issues are questionable among certain groups and individuals and thus it limits the people who they can comfortably and openly discuss these matters. Lesbian girls of color face two dilemmas regarding sexuality including prejudice among their own racial peer group and racism among their identified sexual group, limiting the number of people who may share in an open conversation about their unique situation without fear of being judged (Savin-Williams, 1999).
Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) found the issue of adolescent girls needing someone in whom to confide true when they interviewed twenty-six girls in 8th, 9th, and 10th grades from varying ethnicities and low-income families, they found that what these girls needed and wanted the most was to be heard. The girls spoke openly about issues ranging from personal relationships to home life to cultural differences. By participating in the discussions the girls felt as if their voice was heard and welcomed the interviewing process since it offered them an opportunity to be heard and for a change not taken for granted. Being a helpful listener can make a great difference in a girl’s life and help her move less toward isolation and being at risk for an array of societal downfall and more into inclusion with other females who share similar experiences (Teicher, 1996).

The third type of loss a large number of teenaged girls suffer is educational loss. One of the biggest tragedies experienced in education, although it is hardly even noted – female students are the only group to begin ahead in school but are behind when they leave. Girls start school appearing to be the privileged ones with higher report card grades and hardly ever a mention of misbehavior or academic problems. However, by the time middle school rolls around, females are gradually scoring lower on criterion referenced tests and generally score approximately 50 points lower on the Student Achievement Test (SAT), which is considered an unforgettable mile marker of ability and intelligence (Iglesias & Corimer, 2002).

There has been such a lack of public awareness of females’ educational plight, that it seems almost acceptable to maintain the blatant sexism in school but so very detrimental to over half the schools’ enrollment. It serves as a constant reminder of the overwhelming regularity that girls are considered second rate and consequently the
recipients of a second rate education. What makes these lessons so dangerous is the fact that they transcend high school into the workforce where women’s opinions are rarely taken seriously; they are often paid less than their male counterparts, and given promotions at a lesser rate. Sadker & Sadker (1994) concluded that girls must begin to make their voices heard, “Only when their silence is broken in the classroom will women be heard in the boardroom” (p. 196).

Additional research from the AAUW in 1992 reported that African American, White, and Latina girls have a loss of self esteem and self-assurance where their educational capability is concerned, especially in the areas of math, science, and more recently, in the area of technology, resulting in underachievement and possibly failure. Educational losses were also noted in the area of career preferences and goals which tended to decrease for teenaged girls as opposed to teenaged boys. Another way in which girls of this age are likely to experience an educational loss is through the lack of teachers’ attention, time, and energy which is usually rendered upon boys sending the message, once again, that girls are second rate citizens. While these messages are hidden in nature the results often speak volumes and by high school, teachers’ influence has all but disappeared from many young girls’ lives and they have become “educational spectators instead of players” (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 13). It has also been noted that when children as a whole demand attention, teachers react differently giving boys more direction and girls more nurturing. Furthermore, girls tended to voice their opinions and take educational risks less often than boys succumbing to peer pressure and social acceptance versus academic achievement (Lichtenstein, 1996).
The fourth type of major loss experienced by silenced teenaged girls is behavioral losses. A behavioral loss is made evident by poor decision making, not working up to potential, dropping out of school, and engaging in socially unacceptable behaviors. These kinds of actions are typically thought to be exhibited only by boys but more and more females are displaying acting out behaviors as an approach to simple survival during school. Acting out behaviors in females may include but are not limited to sexual promiscuity, premature and accidental pregnancies, increased risks for sexually transmitted diseases, dysfunctional relationships with other girls and boys, and unhealthy forms of competition that may manifest itself through bullying type behaviors that can be exclusionary, malicious, and counterproductive (AAUW, 1992).

Behavioral losses are exemplified by statistics that show over a million teenaged girls become pregnant every year and the number of ten to fourteen year olds who become pregnant has increased 33% since 1982. Figures differ between racial and cultural backgrounds with approximately one out of twenty-one white females giving birth in 1989 and one out of nine black girls all from ages fifteen to nineteen. However, what most of these girls did have in common were economic status and educational level – all living in poverty with limited schooling. When these girls looked to a bleak future because of failing grades and limited options, they tended not to heed the warnings of getting pregnant at an early age since their situation already seemed dismal and, as a result, were five to six times more likely to have children than their more economically stable peers who were doing well in school (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

In a study conducted by a Washington Post reporter in Washington, D.C., where poverty and teenaged births are considered one of the highest in the nation, Dash (1986)
found that all the girls he interviewed had a variety of stories ranging from fear of birth control to sexual abuse but one common thread was found in every female – they all had experienced school failure and had even repeated up to three grades. They spoke of school displeasure, a sense of neglect by teachers and counselors, and ultimately school failure evident when they dropped out of school – a sense of liberation for most. They discovered something they were good at – bearing children, and this gave them a sense of being successful - as mothers. They also stated that by becoming mothers they gained a source of love, felt more positive about themselves, had a defined a purpose in life, and having children provided a way for them to become more self-sufficient and responsible.

A comparable study was conducted in North Carolina with similar results. These girls were all mothers and ranged in age from twelve to sixteen years of age. Their stories including reasons why they became pregnant were much the same as were stories of school failure and frustration. When assessed for academic achievement, Rauch-Elnekave (1992), found that several of the girls were in need of some type of academic assistance but had never been referred for special services or assessed for learning disabilities. Therefore, a likely conclusion can be drawn that by allowing possible disabilities to go undetected and failure to become insurmountable, teenaged girls may be motivated to become pregnant and have children at an early age to give them some type of meaning in their life. Boys have always been identified for special services at alarming rates while girls in need of help have been cast aside or neglected altogether. Research is beginning to prove that girls may be in as much need as boys although their troubles may not be as noticeable but it is parents and educators’ responsibility to do what they can to expose
and alleviate as many problems as possible to assist all children with futures of promise rather than one of despair and obscurity (Sadker & Sadker, 1992).

As noted earlier, adolescence is a critical time period for all females and research is mounting on how everyone involved can best meet their needs in this turbulent time period to present them with better choices for a healthier development. Society as a whole needs to be more receptive and responsible for the education of our daughters and their welfare. Statistics confirm that females are beginning to smoke more, consider suicide more often, are the devastating majority suffering from eating disorders, and are sexually active at younger ages every year. A great deal of data has also been attained on females’ first sexual experience but little qualitative research has been conducted on the nature of additional experiences, including their expectations of their partner(s) and what they perceive as expected of them when it comes to sex, intimacy, and relationships. The fact that girls are exposed to sex in such a violent manner also should be of great concern since they are sexually abused, raped, and/or molested at such higher proportions than males and often by those who “love” them. Females also experience sexual harassment at astounding rates as well, much of which occurs in school – a place they deserve to feel safe (Girls Report, 2005).

As Reynolds (2003) states in A River Runs Through It, popular culture, including magazines, CD’s, and the almighty television, is prominent in shaping young people’s identity and signifying what to value in life. When adolescent females are already struggling with life’s challenges and how to go about fulfilling their mission in life, images they witness in magazines and on television can confuse them and offer simplistic answers to complex questions. This makes parents and educators’ jobs even more
difficult and uncertain on how best to serve their needs. Nevertheless what we do know is that girls need places where they feel comfortable discussing such pertinent and people who are willing to listen without harsh criticism. Teenaged girls must be encouraged to make their health a priority and vital information and services should be made available with easier access (Girls Report, 2005).

Teenaged girls can be very complex human beings with a wide variety of needs that may vary with race, ethnicity, income level, sexual preference, and/or (dis)ability and tend to experience difficulty growing up in a society that is more inclined to favor males and generally, be more apathetic toward females and their level of success. Gilligan stressed this point in her book, *In a Different Voice* (1982) when she spoke of the time when girls are found that during this significant time period girls go from possessing a solid confidence level found in their convictions to self-doubt and uncertainty resulting in an unwillingness to speak and a lapse in self-esteem. Then while writing *Making Connections* (1990) Gilligan, Lyons, and Hamner, addressed the dilemma again of females struggling with self-worth and regaining their voice but pondered whether this fundamental idea was typical of girls being raised in a patriarchal society or simply characteristic of all young people struggling with the passage into adulthood. She cleared up any confusion on her stance in the Preface of the book. She stated,

“The wind of tradition blowing through women is a chill wind...And because all of the suffering, the endless litany of storm and shipwreck is presented as necessary or even good for civilization, the message to women is: keep quiet and notice the absence of women and say nothing.” (p. 26).

The AAUW reported that curricula in today’s schools often stereotype females or overlook them altogether and that many textbooks simply focus on the accomplishments of men and only shows females in subservient positions. Reading novels without female
heroes or studying history that is void of female contributors reinforce the dangerous notion that a girl’s worth is diminished by her gender (Shields, 1992).

How does the research suggest we attempt to raise adolescent females’ self-esteem and meet their numerous and diverse needs in today’s society besides working toward more equitable educational opportunities? Kuniholm, (2003) an associate director of ministry whose primary responsibilities are supervision of the ministry of girls, the mentoring of potential female leaders, and family ministry, offered a modest but very powerful solution – we essentially give them subtle but explicit permission - permission to be who they are, permission to speak, permission to feel, permission to set boundaries when necessary, and permission to make mistakes. Too often girls believe that they are invisible components of society and that others wish that they would simply go away or at the least just remain quiet. When asking girls what they need, a variety of answers would probably emerge according to who you asked, when you asked, and how you asked.

Kuniholm (2003) found that answers did vary from girl to girl but a few common themes did arise. The first one was permission to speak. When most of us think of teenaged girls we think of them with a phone attached to their ear, never shy when it comes to talking. Ironically, girls felt they needed permission to talk, especially in a group where they tend to fumble with their words and appear less confident about what they are saying when expressing their convictions. One reason this may occur is that studies show that females are interrupted at a disturbing rate in a variety of group settings including schools, businesses, and universities. After being interrupted so many times, it
would be easy to think that people really do not want to hear what you have to say or do not value your opinion.

Girls also need permission to feel. Too frequently, girls are told what they’re feeling is just in their head, that they are too sensitive, or that they over dramatize situations stripping them of their normal feelings. Once again, it is imperative that girls have someone who pays them attention and will listen no matter the topic of conversation. Granted teenaged girls do have a surge of hormones and they may become emotional at times but to discharge what they are feeling is in a sense a form of discharging them or making light of the person they are. Several females reported that family members often dismissed them by saying things like: “Oh it’s not that bad,” or “How could you even think something like that?” Too often, people respond to females by saying, “Is it that time of the month?” or “That’s just an excuse.” By saying this, they are not only focusing undue attention on a natural event but also putting pressure on girls to ignore realistic feelings resulting in possible dangerous consequences by keeping their emotions contained and setting the stage for numerous side effects such as depression, eating disorders, premature and risky sexual behavior, and a silencing that may take years to overcome, if ever (Kuniholm 2003).

Adolescent girls also need the permission to set their own boundaries. This characteristic is critical in giving them the self confidence to deal with situations that may arise that are uncomfortable or unpleasant. It also builds character and raises self-esteem. There are too many times when girls are told to “be nice” instead of making waves, expressing their opinions, or being assertive in thought or action. Girls are also taught to put other people’s needs in front of or in place of theirs keeping them morally
underdeveloped. This places them in jeopardy of not only ever finding the courage to be who they are but also of protecting themselves when required. Girls need to know that it is alright to tell a boy, peer, or acquaintance no when she does not want to have sex or participate in any activity that could be perilous in nature. Limits have to be set in certain situations and females have to be bold enough to do just that – no matter the circumstances (Kuniholm 2003).

One of the most important things that young women need to know is that it is acceptable to make mistakes and falter along the way. Society has typically set up a double standard that cries of indignation and that habitually sends the message that “boys will be boys,” and forgiveness is natural, whereas, if girls participate in the same type of behavior they are often labeled difficult and forgiveness comes less easily and not as quickly. Once this becomes a habit, girls will find it harder to forgive themselves, creating a whole other set of problems, resulting in self-doubt and a diminished self-worth (Kuniholm 2003).

Other recommendations on how to raise self-esteem in females and to ultimately enhance their experiences in order for them to become more successful and fulfilled as adults were suggested by The National Council for Research on Women (2005). Their first suggestion is that for anyone who works directly with girls be reminded of not only problems rooted by gender but also those associated with being female and being poor, Black, Hispanic, a lesbian or bisexual, having a disability, and/or living in communities that have a strong effect on their perspective of current and future circumstances. Another suggestion made was to create programs of support for females in the community,
that schools work closely with these organizations. The AAUW agreed in the fact that there must be a close relationship between schools and community agencies including the media, parents, friends, immediate and extended family members, and government organizations. When girls work with individuals who can identify with them, locate their strengths and work through these, and give them needed support, they are more likely to develop the self-assurance needed to pursue career goals that will enable these individuals to become self-sufficient (Viadero, 1998).

A couple of other ideas proposed by The National Council for Research on Women (2005) were to include a wide variety of significant individuals in the healthy growth of females but particularly to include parents since they ought to be the primary supporters in their daughters’ lives. An environment must be created where teenaged girls feel safe to express themselves and their desires. If everyone would work together, their needs could be met at a quicker pace and possibly even with less obstacles than normal. Adults need to get in the habit of really listening to the fears, anxieties, goals, and dreams of adolescent females and work with one another to settle these issues but not to forget to include the girls in the decision making process. The last suggestion made was to continue research in this area to expand awareness and knowledge of girls’ needs and how best to address each one of them in an effective manner.

Sadker and Sadker (1994) recommended that anyone who cares anything about girls in any realm whether it be their physical well being, their emotional stability, their intellectual growth, or their economic security must view themselves as advocates and fight for their educational equity. They continue by stating that no matter our station in life we have a responsibility to our “daughters” to make time to promote their well being
and to encourage school systems to give them the attention that is warranted in order to close the gap of inequity in our learning institutions across America. Taylor et. al., (1995) agreed in the fact that it is the system that needs changing if we plan on making a difference in girls’ lives. The more their voices are heard, the more changes that will take place. Needless to say, when people stop and listen to what females have to say, it may well be the catalyst needed to boost the system’s awareness of its shortcomings and begin to provide more equitable opportunities.

Although the research base is full of the disproportionate numbers between males and females in special education, the possible reasons for this occurrence, and how females, in general, are shortchanged along with suggestions for making improvements, there has been a lack of research concerning females in special education and practically none on the effects of being the only female in a male-dominated classroom most of the school day. Then to compound the problem, females with moderate to severe disabilities go through most of their school day without the presence of a same sex support group which can be crucial for females in their teenage years. These topics will be explored in the next section of the literature review.

One endeavor that attempted to address gender issues in special education was made a few years ago in a book edited by Rousso & Wehmeyer (2001) entitled *Double Jeopardy: Addressing Gender Equity in Special Education*. Two of the four sections do focus on females and their unique problems associated with being at a “double disadvantage” by being female and having a disability. The editors were criticized, however, in a book review by Hommerding (2001) and published in the *Library Journal* for not including essays of females with disabilities themselves, which would have added
authenticity, and a clearer consciousness of the very subjects they were discussing. An additional critique was that only one essay was authored by a teacher of females with disabilities. On the other hand, the editors viewed this text as a means for opening a dialogue to converse about issues hardly ever discussed relating to females with disabilities and the increasing barriers they face in school and society. The main rationale for writing this book was so educators can begin to “fulfill the promise of a quality education for their students with disabilities who are female and, by extension, all students” (p. 2).

Females with moderate to severe disabilities tend to have lower self-esteem than their peers without disabilities. Shoho & Katims (1997) reported that students who are served through a modified self-contained program (3 or more periods a day) suffer a greater sense of alienation, normlessness, and powerlessness. Students who feel alienated have a tendency to separate themselves from groups, therefore, not pursuing or forming significant relationships with their peers. They also believed that they were not part of the “norm” and were perceived as different from their classmates and thus alienating themselves even further. Students with disabilities also were reported as having feelings of powerlessness, and rather than trying harder at a task, they gave up before a true effort was attempted. Students who consider themselves as powerless are likely to rationalize any effort to achieve or belong as a wasted effort or useless altogether (Shoho & Katims, 1997). In addition, students with learning disabilities often suffer from depression, and experience rejection, failure, and humiliation resulting in a lack of confidence, low self-worth, and a diminished sense of pride (Orenstein, 1994). All of
these feelings are hazardous to one’s emotional health and can further handicap proper development and reduce chances for meaningful opportunities.

Gainful employment and suitable wages are two areas of opportunity that are of primary concern for most every young adult in today’s society. However, women have traditionally earned less money than men and research reports that females with disabilities are at additional disadvantages for unemployment and career advancement. There have been several programs designed to assist teenagers in reaching goals associated with academic performance and career choices, especially with the extreme high unemployment rate among young people, but a major dilemma persists in providing unbiased educational opportunities in the area of career selection and maintenance for all teenagers with and without disabilities (Lichtenstein, 1996).

So much of research’s focus has been placed on boys and their unique problems that the problems girls face have been considered insignificant or gone unnoticed altogether and therefore, most studies have been conducted on boys’ needs or researchers have thought that results could be generalized for all students with disabilities, making their findings “gender blind.” In the National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner, 1992), where over 8,000 boys and girls with disabilities, ages 13 to 21, were studied and results determined that girls had very different experiences than boys did when it came to job opportunities. Even though they graduated at about the same frequency as boys did and often made better grades, females obtained fewer jobs and when employed earned less than young men in similar positions.

Accompanying information from the study suggested that after they had been out of school for up to two to three years, only 32% of the young women were still working
while 52% of the young men were still employed. It was also noted in the study that females had not been afforded the training or vocational support that males had been provided during their high school tenure and this may have been one of the leading causes of a lower success rate. Additional studies have constantly exposed disparities in weekly earnings, hours worked, kinds of positions held, and chances for advancement for females with disabilities as opposed to males with disabilities. As long as these practices remain the same and appear acceptable, females will continue to face injustice, indifference, and ultimately financial insecurity which can place them and their children on a never ending cycle of poverty (Wagner, 1992).

Previous statistics have shown that two thirds of the adult population living in poverty is female. Working is not a past time for these women or simply their livelihood; it is a basis for their continued existence. Women make up over half the work force and are entering the ranks of the employed in large quantities but persistently make approximately only 68% of the wages, usually working in service occupations that generally offer less income. Females with disabilities are faring no better and often are searching for employment without the needed preparation, skills, or post secondary education made available to their male counterparts or females without disabilities (Lichtenstein, 1996 & Fulton, 1994). In a study conducted in Vermont across nine districts, it was determined that after a year out of high school, boys with disabilities were employed at a rate of 73% and the girls were employed at the disturbing rate of only 30%. One year later, it was found that 75% of the males were employed and only 23% of the females held even a part time job. During the same time period, it was discovered that only 8% of the women had full time jobs whereas 57% of the men worked 40 hours or
more a week (Hasazi, Johnson, Hasazi, Gordon, & Hull, 1989). Additionally, it was found that more females with disabilities than males with disabilities became parents while in high school or soon thereafter with a rate of 41% to 16%. Within five years of leaving school it was also noted that 50% of these females became mothers while only 19% of the young men became fathers. Females without disabilities were found to become mothers at a lesser frequency as well with a rate of 28% to 41%. Ultimately, parenthood may be a huge deciding factor when considering an occupation or whether to work at all for females with disabilities, therefore, placing them further at risk for living below the poverty threshold (Fulton, 1994).

In 1992, when the AAUW published a follow-up report on “How Schools Shortchange Girls,” they maintained that all girls receive an education of disproportionate value and by the time they reach high school, are often times tracked toward low paying careers and have been essentially ignored from educational reforms since the passage of Title IX in 1972. Among other major findings, the AAUW contends that without proper training, attention, and education girls were likely to be, not only unprepared for independent living after high school, but also left with less self-confidence to make vital decisions imperative for healthy living. It was also noted that many females considered at-risk left without a diploma and with a child and consequently increased their chances of perpetuating the status quo of single-parent families living in poverty. In their conclusion, they stress the fact that policy makers must be prompted to take immediate and drastic action since a substandard education of females can play a key role in adding to the already staggering statistics of women and children living in poverty (Thurston & Navarrete, 2003).
Another study was conducted in four different states about young women living in poverty. The authors found that approximately 40% of the women had at least one child with identified learning and/or behavioral problems and that the chances of having a child with special needs doubled when the mother had less than a ninth grade education. Seventy-nine percent of the mothers who did not graduate from high school had children with disabilities, with 10th grade being the average grade completed. Only 11% of the mothers were employed and 88% received government assistance.

Fujiura and Yamaki (2000) established that there is a direct link between poverty and accomplishments made educationally and developmentally and although the salary gap has declined for women with advanced degrees, considerable discrepancies linger in most job-related categories. They also found that the school system, particularly the classroom, may be the main arena where females are persuaded to take charge of their education and ultimately their lives by teachers, counselors, and mentors stressing the importance of a good education and appropriate job training since they have experienced years of low wages, inconsistent and too often nonexistent child support, and dwindling benefits from the government. This forces them to remain in one of the United State’s poorest demographic categories despite the increase in various job opportunities, the long term efforts of feminists, antidiscrimination laws that have been passed to deter inequity in the work force (Thurston & Navarrette, 2003 & O’Neil, 1990).

Educators have legitimate concerns about the impact that poverty has on the healthy development and prosperity of children. Studies show that poor students often receive unfair treatment in school, less attention from their teachers, and fall prey to more punishments and fewer rewards than other students. Although educators believe they are
not influenced by society’s values, many teachers expect more from White, middle and upper class students than they do from students who are minorities or from impoverished families. Teachers are more prone to refer students of color and poor students for special education programs such as learning disabilities and emotional/behavior disorders and less likely to refer them to programs for the gifted and talented (Grossman, 2002). In a study conducted by Blair and Scott (2002) with students between the ages of 12 to 14, it was discovered that between 30% and 39% of the students with a learning disability were from families who lived below the poverty threshold. In addition, it was found that roughly 75% of children with emotional/behavior disorders came from underprivileged families. In another study conducted in New York City on which newborns were at risk for special education services, it found that children who required special services in the early grades could be detected as early as three years of age and had been born to mothers living in poverty (Goldberg, McLaughlin, Grossi, Tytun, & Blum, 1992). Students from low socioeconomic families also experience academic failure at higher rates and drop out of school more often than their peers from more affluent environments (Polakow, 1993).

This information is vital when convincing policy makers, educators, and school boards that improved and more equitable learning opportunities are critical when it comes to the education of females with disabilities. Not only do they need additional resources but they also need extra support and well-defined programs that assist in job preparation and attainment of career goals in order to make them self-reliant and be able to thrive rather than just survive (Thurston & Navarrette, 2003). The focus on young women with disabilities, their educational opportunities, and future employment has to be a priority for educators to improve their chances of success and reduce their chances of becoming
yet another statistic. Future employers need also be made aware of unique circumstances and how simple encouragement and assurance can create an atmosphere where women with disabilities can prosper and begin to break the cycle that has been sustained for decades (Fulton, 1994). Additional research is vital in this area in order to properly serve the needs of all learners, no matter what their disability or gender happens to be.

Difficulties thrust upon females with disabilities have been illustrated in previous sections and are hard to dispute. Additional details about their educational experiences suggest that they may be further handicapped due to the environment where they spend most of their school day. It has already been documented that females with moderate to severe disabilities spend the bulk of their day in classes surrounded by guys with a very small chance of even having one other female in the room with them. How does this affect them socially and/or educationally? Currently, there is very little research on this subject and the data that is available is not conclusive and/or varies with age groups. This makes it even more essential that research of this nature be conducted in order to make meaningful decisions regarding the educational experiences of females with disabilities.

During early childhood, there is clear evidence that children prefer playing with children of the same sex and have an easier time relating to same sex peers (Butler & Kratz, 2000, & Lafreniere, Strayer, & Gauthier, 1984). It is not apparent why this is so prevalent but some researchers believe it is simply the difference in interaction styles – with boys generally being rougher and louder while girls tend to be more passive and quieter in comparison. Another reason suggested is that girls have less physical control over boys and boys were less likely to listen to girls when their ideas were verbalized (Maccoby, 1990 & Maccoby, 1988). Other studies have proposed that by kindergarten
girls refrain from expressing their thoughts, emotions, generally act differently in the company of boys, and when given a choice, interact with other girls more often than boys (Serbin, Moller, Gulko, Powlishta, & Colburne 1994).

However, as girls mature and develop their own sense of style, their preferences may change according to their experiences and objectives. Currently, with so much of the recent dialogue on girls’ aversive behaviors including covert bullying, professionals have begun to take a closer look at the behavior of girls and how they respond to peers of the same sex as well as the opposite sex. There is no doubt that practically every female has a best friend so to speak and probably has anywhere from two to five girlfriends with whom she hangs out or participates in certain activities on a regular basis. These intimacies can be very personal and very powerful whereby adolescent girls learn what it means to not only have friends, but also to be a friend. It is in such relationships that young women learn the very essence of camaraderie – they learn to support one another, share each other’s secrets, and simply enjoy each other’s company. Some specialists even believe that is why females commonly outlive males – because of friendships they create and maintain throughout their lives (Girls Can Be Bullies, 2005).

Additional reports stated that girls choose to hang out with other girls simply because of their likenesses and the simple fact that boys usually do not understand the intricacies of the female mind and can not handle what all girls have to say and in the manner in which they say it. Boys also tend to become nervous or uncomfortable when girls express their emotions. Nonetheless, some girls prefer to build friendships with members of the opposite sex for various reasons. They assert that being friends with other females is just too difficult and that members of the opposite sex requires less effort to
have them as companions because it is not as complicated and there is less drama involved when your friends are boys, in essence boys are less emotional and when hanging with the guys, females do not have to worry as much about the way they dress, being the victims of gossip, or being purposely left out of the group. Other girls reported that having male friends is just plain fun and they like the attention they get when they are the only female in a group of boys (DiMarco, 2005).

On the other hand, other females disputed the notion that boys are better friends because they contend that females really need the companionship, nurturing, attention, communication, and encouragement that only other females can provide. In same sex classrooms, researchers found that girls were more inclined to answer questions freely, engage in active discussions about controversial topics, and essentially feel fewer inhibitions about their level of intelligence. The AAUW admitted that same sex classrooms may increase test scores, give girls more self-assurance, and persuade them to take more risks but may not be the best suited arena to create equal opportunities and promote proper socialization. They reported that single sex classrooms may even have negative effects perpetuating sexist stereotypes and The National Organization for Women (NOW) insists that by separating girls and boys, we would not be alleviating any present dilemmas and would be completely ignoring what was learned during the civil rights movement and that “separate can never be equal” (Feminists will be Feminists, 2004), plus most professionals would agree that if boys and girls do not have the opportunity to learn to interact with one another, respect each other, and gain knowledge of each other’s similarities and differences, learning to value one another will be made more difficult thus creating additional problems (Bushweller, 1995).
Still, we can not discount the fact that many females feel uncomfortable in the presence of males under many circumstances and possibly this uneasiness increases when females are in an extreme minority situation. In some cases, where girls have participated in heated debates in the company of boys, the boys would suggest that they were participating in what some may call a “Cat Fight,” hence calling the girls’ attention to their behavior and, believing they were acting inappropriately, would cease their discussion (A Girl’s Perspective on All-Girls Classrooms, 2005).

In a recount of a young man’s early years, he detailed many of his experiences growing up. Among these was how he acted when he was with other boys. He described several activities in which he participated and, as an adult looking back, thought them to be ludicrous. He could only account for his actions by saying that he was different when he was with just boys. They had what he called “A pack mentality.” He even compared their actions to those of animals and admitted that guys in groups are somewhat scary. He believed that they try to impress one another, out do each other, and lose all inhibitions in an effort to gain approval and/or the respect of the other members of the group even if it means disregard of another’s feelings or his/her dignity (Growing up in the 50’s, 2005). This information is especially frightening when females with disabilities spend practically their entire day in a male-dominated setting. They already are placed in a difficult situation that makes them a minority within a minority but to add the absence of a same sex support group can be detrimental, although some girls admit to liking the attention of an all male classroom, the adverse effects can outweigh the perceived advantages. This is just one more aspect that policy makers, administrators, counselors,
and teachers need to consider when arranging for a more equitable education for females with disabilities and one more reason why research in this field is so important.

Who is the favored sex? Who gets shortchanged? These are topics that create controversy and even hostility at times among many professionals. Several critics (Cassell, 2003; Viadero, 1998; Ravitch, 1996; Sommers, 1993; Bushweller, 1995; Shields, 1992) have voiced their opinion in the past few years and the results show that the debate is far from over and the evidence is open to interpretation. Sadker & Sadker (1994) reported that while females experience silent losses, the losses boys suffer are so loud they can be heard down the hallways of schools and ultimately throughout society. Research shows that boys do rise to the top of their class and earn higher test scores but they land at the bottom of society’s ladder by experiencing a higher degree of life’s ills. As reported earlier, boys are the predominate sex referred to mental health facilities, placed in special education programs, and diagnosed with learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disorders, and attention deficit disorders in record numbers. They also fail more classes, are retained more often, and dropout of school at higher frequencies. Furthermore, boys are more prone to accidents, take more risks, commit suicide and murder at greater rates, and are incarcerated in much larger quantities than females. As a result, they not only endanger their academic future, but also their very existence (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Academically speaking some critics scoff at the fact that boys do better than girls in school. They may score higher on the SAT but Ravitch (1996) reported that they are 50% more likely to be retained, less likely to graduate from high school and, consequently, less likely to enter college or receive bachelors and/or masters degrees.
Twenty to thirty years ago men made up approximately 90% of the students attending medical and law schools across the country. Today women make up almost half the enrollment. Boys tend to make higher scores on math and science tests but lag behind in reading, language, and writing scores – skills that probably impact people’s lives the most.

According to the critics, besides experiencing more academic problems than females, boys appear to suffer more adjustment problems when it comes to the school setting than girls usually experience. They are generally more energetic than females, and tend to experience hyperactivity almost nine times more than females; they are usually more aggressive, dealing with situations in less compromising manners, and boys are normally more impulsive and less accommodating than females. Nevertheless when they enter kindergarten and restrictions are placed upon their behavior, they experience what some may call a culture shock. The school culture forces them to conform to rules that on the surface just seem to require obedience but in essence requires young boys to basically change who they are (Sadker & Sadker, 1992). Some critics believe that it is because of an ongoing battle that female teachers create by expecting boys to behave in a manner that is unnatural, and downright dangerous to the proper development of young men. One critic, Admiral F. E. Chadwick, even believed that it was the influx of female teachers during the early portion of the twentieth century that proposed a serious barrier to boys receiving the type of education that was fitting for a healthy young man. Possibly because of his claims and great public support, organized sports were created in the school systems to channel boys’ energy into more appropriate avenues of less resistance (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).
However, boys continued to experience a great deal of difficulty in school and for years have been referred for special education services. Statistics show that an overwhelming number of boys are diagnosed with learning disabilities and emotional/behavior disorders and make up practically 75% of the special education population, spending most of their school day in an alternative setting. Boys also are more likely to have speech impediments, labeled attention deficit disordered, and are prescribed Ritalin anywhere from four to eight times more than girls (Bushweller, 1995; Ravitch, 1996; & Cassell, 2003). Moreover they are the recipients of more punishment than female students and appear on suspension lists at distressing rates. Boys develop unattainable career goals such as professional athletes, doctors, lawyers, or entertainers, and when these goals are not met, and dreams go unfulfilled, they may undergo a lifetime of disappointment and despair creating problems creating and maintaining successful relationships (Sadker & Sadker, 1992).

Outside of educational stress, boys suffer from further societal woes perhaps due to the manner in which they are raised and the pressure that is put upon them to be aggressive and remain pillars of strength throughout all circumstances – ignoring feelings such as sadness and grief that might otherwise suggest they were less a man. These stereotypes begin at an early age with certain personality characteristics drilled into their head. In a study of elementary school boys, it was determined that by the second grade, boys have to disregard any feelings or actions that are deemed “feminine” if they wanted acceptance by their peers. Acceptance is a strong tool and most children conform to almost anything in order to avoid rejection and/or ridicule. While girls are not persuaded to possess male characteristics, boys are strongly encouraged to forego any qualities that
resemble their female counterparts. The pressure of having to hide their emotions, mask their true feelings, and succumb to society’s demands may add to the reasons boys experience so many problems in life. These are only a couple of possible reasons suggested for the overabundance of problems boys face on a daily basis. Plausible or not, statistics continue to speak volumes about the severity of the tribulations that haunt our male population (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Research shows that boys are three times more probable to develop alcoholism, 50% more likely to use illegal drugs, and they make up almost 90% of arrests involving drugs and alcohol. Studies show that females suffer from low self-esteem and depression at greater rates but that boys commit suicide more often and in alarming numbers. In 1997 alone, 4,483 youth took their own life between the ages five and twenty-four. Almost 4,000 of these needless deaths were males (Cassell, 2003). Ravitch (1996) reported that between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, young men killed themselves at a rate of six times higher than the frequency for females in the same category, asking the question if there is any more of an indicator of low self esteem than the decision to take one’s life?

Boys are not only killing themselves but they are killing each other and others as well. Being unsuccessful in the school setting often leads them to being disruptive, and menaces in the school environment, and eventually put out of school leaving them unprepared to earn competitive wages or prepared to pursue an acceptable career. Consequences of these actions can result in a life time of crime, juvenile detention, or even imprisonment. Statistics report that males make up a monstrous 94% of the incarcerated population in this country – a staggering number that leaves many children
without fathers and a forced separation from family members and friends, making the problem even more complicated and the cycle of violence even stronger (Bushweller, 1995).

As a result of the preceding information, many critics believe that time is wasted on determining who society favors or who is being shortchanged. There is disdain for The AAUW’s report on “How Schools Shortchange Girls” with several professionals believing that it only serves to distract attention from “real problems” and is overall inaccurate from the beginning (Viadero, 1998) and Ravitch (1996) even goes so far as to call it, “A Gender Bias Myth.” She believes that educators do not dissuade females from taking certain classes or pursuing the career of their choice; she also believes that females are doing fine overall, and that The AAUW needs to end their accusations of gender bias in the schools and put an end to a crisis that she believes simply does not exist. Shields (1992) examined The AAUW’s account of how females are treated in schools and he reports that the genuine issue is not who gets shortchanged but achievement is the main factor in this controversial equation. He believes that the overall achievement level of the American student is lacking and talk of gender simply distracts discussions on a much needed plan of action for improving all learners’ success.

This review of literature regarding current referral and placement practices in the field of special education, how the school system has generally “shortchanged girls, suggestions for alleviating inequalities, the implications for females with disabilities in male dominated settings, and which category of school children critics believe should presently be the focus of educators’ concern yielded the following results. Throughout the history of special education boys have been the sex predominately evaluated and
placed in classes for children with disabilities. More boys than girls are diagnosed with attention deficit disorders, learning disabilities, and emotional/behavior disorders. The research revealed that approximately 75% of students classified as needing special education services were boys. Professionals offered several reasons for this widespread occurrence. Social and cultural factors were one explanation offered based on how the role of the male and female child is defined in today’s society. Another possible reason for this phenomenon is biological factors since boys are more vulnerable to genetic disorders and girls are less likely to have birth defects and they mature at a faster pace displaying behaviors that are deemed more appropriate especially in the school setting. A third major cause of boys being over represented in special education programs is the interaction between students and teachers. Teachers play a crucial role in the referral process and although they may deny it, teachers oftentimes have hidden biases about how students should behave and may be less tolerant of acting out behaviors resulting in more boys being referred for services. Perceptions, prejudices, and experiences all play a role in the referral process and since most children are evaluated in the early grades where most teachers are women, boys’ problems may be compounded since women may have a different idea on what is acceptable behavior from boys than male teachers would.

This phenomenon is widespread; however, numerous statistics propose that more girls have problems that are either unrecognized or undiagnosed since they exhibit more introverted type behaviors such as depression and attention deficit disorders minus the hyperactivity. Research also states that girls usually compensate for their inadequacies by displaying teacher pleasing behaviors for instance cooperation and cheerfulness. Other reasons offered are that parents and teacher attribute girls’ behavior to other things rather
than attention deficit disorders, learning disabilities or emotional/behavior disorders such as being a tomboy involved in sports, a daydreamer who drifts off into a fantasy world, or a “Chatty Kathy,” describing someone who talks a great deal, disorganized, silly, or who is considered ditzy in nature.

The crux of the literature review was concentrated on females’ losses and proposals for overcoming those losses, plus how it impacts females with disabilities in society and in their school environment. Numerous studies have expressed a steady decline in self-esteem as young girls move through adolescence that results in serious side effects that are visible through emotional, physical, educational, and behavioral losses. Emotional losses constitute the manner in which females express their feelings and studies show that all girls tend to hide their true emotions in order to avoid conflict. When they begin to voice their opinions, they are often viewed as troublemakers and too willful, perhaps silencing them even further. Physical losses are manifested by the manner in which young girls see themselves physically and as sexual beings. Several young women are so concerned with the public’s opinion about how they look to the point they are literally making themselves sick and several are dying due to diseases such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

Educational losses are made evident by the lower scores on criterion referenced tests and the SAT, even though report card grades are usually higher for girls. Females are usually victims of gender biased curriculum and recipients of teachers’ attention much less than boys. Furthermore, school aged girls tended to voice their opinions less than boys and take fewer educational risks since they are also inclined to choose limited career goals and the level of job preferences decline as girls move into higher grades
surrendering to peer pressure and social acceptance versus academic achievement. Behavioral losses are apparent by low self-worth, poor decision making skills, not working up to potential, dropping out of school, and engaging in socially unacceptable behaviors. Acting out behaviors includes but are not limited to sexual deviancies such as promiscuity resulting in accidental or premature pregnancies, increased risks for sexually transmitted diseases, and dysfunctional relationships. Females with low self-esteem regularly become sexually active at a young age in order to gain approval, validate their beauty or appeal, and end up being confused about their role in the entire sexual process, which once again can end up being a very harmful or even deadly situation with the increase of reported sexually transmitted diseases among teenagers. Behavioral losses are exemplified by the thousands of teenaged girls who get pregnant every year with a large amount of them having two things in common – living below the poverty level and limited schooling. When asked about their pregnancy(ies) most of the girls had experienced failure in school, saw their futures as bleak, and reported that by becoming mothers it gave them a purpose in life and a source of unconditional love.

Ways to overcome losses for females have been made available in the literature as well. Mentoring was clearly one way to give assistance to females when they are struggling with the many obstacles they face while trying to find out who they are and who they will become. Research shows that girls who have an active mentor in their life experience less turmoil and make better decisions. There are also suggestions on how to advise a young woman going through adolescence and which needs should be a mentor’s primary focus. Females essentially need permission to be who they are - they need to know it is alright if they do not follow the societal norm or if they choose to be just what
society expects them to be. Some young women are made to feel guilty if they choose to become wives and mothers instead of pursuing a career outside the home; they need to know that this is an acceptable choice, as long as it is their choice.

As silly as it sounds, since we think of teenaged girls talking all the time, they need permission to speak. Too often girls are interrupted when they are speaking thus diminishing the value of what they are saying. Also, if females participate in heated debates, it is often referred to as a “cat fight,” and they are then prone to stop the discussion. Females also need permission to feel. Repeatedly girls are told that what they are feeling is just in their head or that they are too emotional which only serves to strip them of their feelings, making them, once again, feel unworthy. Adolescent girls also need the permission to set boundaries. Too often girls are told to “be nice” instead of making waves and this teaches them to put others’ needs in front of their own. Setting boundaries is essential in a young woman’s development. Females also need to know that it is acceptable to make mistakes. Society as a whole is tougher on females when too often boys’ behavior is dismissed as “boys will be boys,” but when girls act in accordance, people want to act shocked, therefore setting up a double standard with public and personal forgiveness coming less quickly and not as easily.

The research on females with disabilities was extremely sparse in the professional literature, which in itself speaks volumes. It was found that females with disabilities require additional attention as opposed to their general education peers due to the fact that they tend to experience a greater sense of alienation, normlessness, and powerlessness along with an impaired self-esteem. Consequently, this category of school girls often suffer a higher rate of depression, more experiences of rejection and failure, a lack of
self-confidence that is needed to make important life decisions, and a diminished sense of pride. The research also indicated that having a disability and being female manifests itself through a higher rate of unemployment, widespread poverty, and premature pregnancy placing these young women at greater risks than their peers without disabilities. Statistics were overwhelming when it came to poverty levels and females with disabilities. The research had already shown that females, in general, make up two thirds of the adult population living below the poverty threshold but additional statistics show that females with disabilities are employed less and have children at higher rates than boys with disabilities or young women without disabilities. It was also noted that females with disabilities living in poverty have a greater chance of having a child or children with disabilities. In one particular study of women living in poverty, the authors found that roughly 40% of the women had at least one child with identified learning and/or emotional/behavioral disorders and that the chances of having a child with special needs doubled when the mother had less than ninth grade education. In another study, it was reported that approximately 75% of children identified with emotional/behavior disorders were from poor families and that in New York City alone, when investigating which newborns were at risk for special educational services, it was found that the ones who needed special attention were detected as early as three years of age and all born to mothers living in poverty. Additional information showed that there was a direct link between poverty and educational success in that poorer children frequently do not receive fair treatment in school, received less attention from teachers, and fell prey to more punishment and fewer rewards even though most teachers report they are not influenced by society’s values, research shows they expect more from White, middle and upper class
students. In an additional section of the literature review on females with disabilities it was noted that more often than not, girls prefer to be friends with other females rather than members of the opposite sex. Although some of the research found that some girls chose to hang out with only boys because there can be less drama or they enjoy the attention they receive by being the only female in the group. However, most of the information located, affirmed that girls need each other for support, companionship, communication, and encouragement and that reasons for wanting to be with only boys can be superficial in nature. This information is vital since most females with disabilities spend most of their school day in classes with predominately boys without a same sex support group, which often may only make problems worse.

In the last section of the literature review, the writer thought it only fair for an opposing view to be presented of critics’ opinions of why this study should focus on females with disabilities rather than the male gender. Boys remain the overwhelming majority referred to mental health facilities and diagnosed with learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disorders, and attention deficit disorders in record numbers. They also fail more classes, are retained more often, and dropout of school at higher frequencies. Furthermore, boys are more prone to accidents, take more risks, commit suicide and murder at greater rates, and are a mind-bogglingly majority in our criminal justice system. I admit these facts are undisputed; however, by focusing on the male gender so frequently, we are continuing to neglect the needs of an important part of the population by acting as if they do not matter or even exist. Females with disabilities represent roughly 25% of the special education population but females represent half the world’s population, and 100% of the mothers, who are, let’s face it, the ultimate givers’
of life. Even though single father families are on the rise in this country, single mothers are responsible for raising over ten million children alone in this country and several of these young women are teenaged moms who have been diagnosed with a disability, reported little success in school and, as a result, leave school prematurely lessening their chances of finding a suitable job making enough money to properly take care of themselves, much less, a child and, therefore desperately need our attention. The goal of this study was to assist in placing the attention of educators, politicians, school boards, and lay citizens on this population and narrow the substantial gap in special education literature on the effects of being female in a male dominated setting most of the school day.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

“It is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.”

- Audre Lorde

Methodological Principals

Since this proposed study dealt with the lived experiences, concerns, and issues of emancipation of girls in special education, the theory that guided the research was feminist phenomenology. This interdisciplinary method assisted in explaining experiences adolescent females with disabilities had as a result of being collectively marginalized by being placed in an educational setting with the majority of males throughout their academic day. This approach served to focus on understanding how these young women handled their distinctive situation of being placed in such a minority, and consequently, by telling their stories, and realizing the impact of their unique set of circumstances, assisted them in at least one form of liberation – an awareness, and a beginning toward the path of self-reliance (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

For feminists using a phenomenological standpoint, the individual lives of both female teachers and students offer narratives of the multifaceted and conflicting manners in which females create their identity in reaction to school mores that exist to reproduce unequal gender relations in the school culture and in society. Gender identity begins as a young child and continues throughout our lives. Schools are responsible in part for maintaining the status quo in a predominately patriarchal society by what is included in the curriculum and by what is not (or hidden) in the curriculum. These hidden and/or
mixed messages are responsible for adding to the decreased self-esteem and domination of females and their thought process (Martusewicz & Reynolds, 1994) by emphasizing gender differences. Studies continually report that teachers call on boys more often and given more opportunities to answer critical thinking questions – sending the message that boys think on a higher level than girls do (this may not be true but it is the message that is sent). The hidden curriculum is also responsible for sending the message that males are more capable and therefore more important than females when teachers give boys more leadership type roles and they receive most of the teachers’ attention (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). Giroux (1983) adds that hidden messages imply who will be successful in future endeavors – a rather powerful and dangerous message to be sending by teachers or any professional devoted to the well being and healthy development of young people.

Phenomenology is defined as the study of people’s perceptions as related from the first-person point of view. It has been practiced (unknowingly) for hundreds of years by such prominent individuals as Kant, Descartes, and Hume but German philosopher Edward Husserl is considered the founder of this theoretical movement formed early in the 20th century. Through a montage of prominent works by Husserl and then continued in the course of research and writings of renowned philosophers Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology began to flourish (Phenomenology, 2004). Marshall and Rossman, authors of Designing Qualitative Research (1999) described phenomenology as:

The study of lived experiences and the way we understand those experiences to develop a worldview. It rests on an assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated (p.112).
Phenomenological inquiry is also explained as interpretive in nature, designed to focus on human perception and experience. “In its most basic form, phenomenological inquiry investigates the distinctly human perceptions which appear directly to the perceptions of other people,” (Willis, as cited in Short, 1991, pp.173-174). It is characterized mainly by the exploration of a lived experience by placing oneself in the present world wherein the participants actually live and create experiences. This serves to provide a more meaningful knowledge base and to be able to convey richer descriptions of those themes that reveal themselves as the research evolves (van Manen, 1984a).

Based on the previous definitions, it is apparent that phenomenology is not clear-cut but requires a deep understanding that may not be possible to comprehend from the outside or from studying perceptions or what it means to be truly conscious of a phenomenon. Van Manen (1984a) asserted that the only way to grasp the concept of phenomenology fully is by actually doing it. He offered several distinctive features of phenomenological research that may be helpful in clarifying what it means to conduct research of this nature. First, he explained that phenomenological research explores lived experience as it happens – even before we envision it. Secondly, this type of research searches for the heart of the experience and events surrounding the experience rather than a presumptuous notion of what it means to have that experience. Third, he stated what he believed personifies phenomenological research the most, which is thoughtfulness. Manen considers thoughtfulness to embody this design since it is the essence of what it means to be alive and not to take that for granted. The next feature simply states that this type of research is not conducted just to gather information but to affect individual’s lives in a positive manner. The last attribute Manen detailed is the way in which the results are
communicated. He thinks that mere writing will not suffice but a more poetic form of text is desired so a more powerful presence is available to portray the beauty in what has been discovered (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2000).

The preceding paragraph characterized phenomenological research as described by van Manen. He also summarized four key measures he believes helpful to steer the investigator on the right course for conducting phenomenological research. First, the researcher selects a phenomenon of personal interest that virtually will immerse her into the world of the phenomenon itself in order to produce genuine results. Secondly, the investigator simply examines the chosen phenomenon as it exists rather than as she believes it to exist hypothetically. The third procedure is critical to the entire process – reflection of the themes that have presented themselves during the research process and then last is the printed version of those themes by way of the writing process.

Moustakas (1994), who has been influential in the field of phenomenology for several decades, outlined several techniques that he believes are essential when conducting research of this nature. The first technique is simply a dedication to phenomenology as a qualitative research method. The second principle reminds the researcher that in order to carry out a study of this design, it is necessary to concentrate on the entire process rather than individual segments. The next principle that grounds phenomenological research is an exploration for meaning instead of playing by all the rules that have been designed to guide the researcher. Without meaningful research, phenomenology would cease to exist. The fourth technique maintains that people’s experiences are the main source of information gathered by the researcher. Other techniques may be used such as observations but it is the first person’s descriptions that
are key in developing an understanding of the phenomenon examined. The last principle outlined requires that this type of design be driven by a passion of the researcher and that there exists a personal investment and dedication to the project. Essentially phenomenology is based on the interpretation of experiences detailed to the researcher in a conscious manner putting aside, any assumptions we may hold on the subject. Husserl and his supporters believed that this is the starting point of seeing the world as it really exists (Shank, 2002).

A phenomenological research design requires an open mind where previous thoughts and prejudices have been reserved or set aside in order to recognize developing themes that may emerge as data is reviewed and analyzed. This approach appears to be most appealing when attempting to understand the worlds of people who are part of the silent majority or who have been marginalized by a society simply for being born to a condition that is beyond their control. This type of research could authenticate oppressed individuals and their experiences by giving them an opportunity to tell their stories and validate their existence. An example is the research study conducted with adults who have developmental disabilities. Researchers found that self-expression and participation were high in all individuals by using active listening and a minimal response method. Results showed that all participants communicated some of the same issues faced on a daily basis and seemed to appreciate the fact that their stories were being heard and accepted (Hoshmand, 1985).

Another example of putting this research design to use was the study conducted by Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) which was the basis for their book, Between Voice and Silence Women and Girls, Race, and Relationship.” These authors
interviewed 26 teenaged girls from an inner city school and traced their development throughout 8th, 9th, and 10th grades. By doing this, they found that what these girls really enjoyed was the supportive active listening that took place on a variety of topics ranging from problems at school to problems of a more personal nature – their home life. The authors also realized that this type of listening was not only necessary for the healthy development of these young women but was also sadly uncommon. This insight and obvious need was what lead them to develop mentoring programs for females considered “at risk” giving them an avenue to share their feelings with other females with whom they could build a relationship such as teachers, social workers, and other significant members of the community. Too often, parents make statements to the effect that their daughter never talks to them and teachers can be just as guilty by dismissing what teenaged girls have to say by calling them “drama queens” or telling them it is just their imagination. As Teicher (1996) reviewed the work of Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan, she questioned what adults would actually learn if they took the time to listen to adolescent girls considered “at risk?” Adults have to be prepared to listen to any topic at hand and truly share in their grief, happiness, sadness, or whatever emotion they may be feeling at the time. They have to know what they are going to share will be accepted without judgment or harsh criticism. Ordinarily, just knowing that someone is taking the time to listen to you without judgment can be enough to boost a young girl’s confidence and validate her self-worth to the point where she is more equipped to handle life’s pressures as they are presented. This simple act of listening and creation of a support system could make all the difference in a girl’s life and in the healthy progression toward adulthood.
Marshall and Rossman (1999) described what they believe it means to be a feminist and to conduct research with a feminist agenda. Feminist theorists place females at their focal point and labor extensively to reveal cultural and institutional sources that reinforce oppression and sexism. Not only do feminist theorists value women’s experiences, they also promote concepts that challenge male domination and exclusion of women in areas where, historically, they have been omitted. As early as the Middle Ages, and perhaps even earlier, women have been fighting against a system of patriarchal rule and the suppression of women. We are a few years into the 21st century and women are still struggling for their voices to be heard, perspectives to be changed, and equal rights to be granted in the home, workplace, within the educational system, and in society as a whole. Surprisingly, many religious women had a “female consciousness” and fought against patriarchal rule even though the church itself was the epitome of such rule.

During the 12th century, Nuns Hrostvitha of Gandersheim and Hildegaarde of Bengen used their faith as a way to criticize the power men had over them and began to form communities to resist this widespread practice that was extremely difficult to challenge since women worked in isolation, had no formal schooling, and had no obvious forms of authority except man, and therefore, had no apparent means of battling their oppressors or the system that dominated their existence. Even though authority seemed obscure, several types of underlying authority were present such as motherhood, mysticism, community, education, and most of all themselves (Lerder, 1993).

Early in the development of these United States, and still about 200 years away from an actual feminist movement, women fought for the right of women to have their voices heard and often paid the price with their lives. Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer
were two such women. Both women migrated to the United States in the 1600’s to escape religious persecution in England but when they began holding ceremonies of their own (since women were not allowed to speak in the church) they were banished from their colony and both eventually were killed. Approximately 30 years after their deaths, the infamous Salem witch trials took place, singling out women who had what they called “questionable behavior” for the times but most were merely women who were outspoken, questioned the church’s rule, or in essence questioned patriarchal rule (Britannica, 2003).

Several other women blazed the trails in the 17th and 18th centuries. Phillis Wheatley, a former slave who was taught to read and write by her “mistress” and two daughters, eventually began to write poetry and published several books on religion and morality. After her death, abolitionists, to contest charges of inferiority and to promote educational opportunities for blacks, quoted her books as references (Britannica, 2003). Mary Wollenstonecraft, an English woman contended that if men and women were given the same educational opportunities, women could have a variety of options in and outside the home. She published _A Vindication of the Rights of Woman_ in 1792, which was greeted with great controversy with no surprise. It failed to bring any abrupt changes to the women’s movement of the times but both American and European women revived several of its principles in the 1840’s at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York (Bolt, 1995).

The 1848 Seneca Falls Convention signaled what some historians call the “Second Wave” of feminism and the official beginning of the Suffragist Movement. Inspired by the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840 and devised by such leaders as Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, these women, along with approximately 300
spectators and key speakers such as the renowned abolitionist and orator, Frederick Douglass, were able to unanimously pass 11 out of 12 of their major resolutions. The only resolution not to pass was the Women’s Suffrage Resolution, which we know did not pass until roughly 70 years later with the ratification of the 19th amendment (Britannica, 2003).

Several women took up the fight for women’s rights, in particular, Susan B. Anthony, who founded The National Women’s Suffrage Association, Carrie Chapman Catt, and the founder of The League of Women Voters, and who, along with Alice Paul, formed The National Women’s Party in 1913 and The World Women’s Party in 1938. There were numerous other women who fought for women’s rights during this “second wave” such as Ida B. Wells, a reformer and journalist, Charlotte Perkins Gilmore, a writer for women’s rights, Margaret Sanger, a leader in the fight for birth control, and Jane Adams, a social worker and founder of the Hull House (Britannica, 2003).

After World War I ended and women’s suffrage had been accomplished, the “fight” was taken out of women with an economic depression looming in the years ahead, several women being sent from their factory jobs they held during the war, back to “the pots and pans,” and with no subject matter capable of uniting women like the right to vote had done, the wind was taken out of the women’s movement (Bolt, 1995, p. 9). There was disagreement, not only about the meaning of feminism, but also what their goals should be hereafter. With such disarray within the movement and the majority of men thinking, “Enough had been done for women with the vote,” a dormant period began that would last until the Revolution of the 1960’s (p. 97-98).
With the Great Depression of the 1930’s and World War II in the 1940’s, there was renewed support for women to stay at home even though some did return to work in the factories until the end of the war. After the war, however, a sense of “normalcy,” was called upon and it was this “normalcy” that forced women back into stereotypical roles as wives and stay-at-home mothers, encouraged by society, magazine advertisements, and television to look, dress, and act in a specific manner – submissive and pleasing (Britannica, 2003).

During this infamous dormant period, several women “kept hope alive” by continuing to educate young women, and challenging stereotypes held by society for decades and in a sense centuries. Mary Bethune, an educator and founder of The National Council of Negro Women, formed Mary Bethune Cookman College to enable young black women to continue their education. She also became an advisor to President Roosevelt and became the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1940. Margaret Meade was an anthropologist who challenged assumptions about gender relations and wrote about her beliefs in the book, *Sex and the Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (Bondi, 1995). The philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, has been given credit for liberating many women from patriarchal rule and is called “The Founding Mother and Theoretician of Modern Feminism.” Beauvoir wrote the book, *The Second Sex*, which disputed several contradictions, previously held about women (Britannica, 2003). In the book she states that the argument over feminism will continue as long as men and women do not see each other as equals, and as long as the thought of femininity keeps its ancient version of what it means to be female or male. The dispute remains that if women and men are identical then where
would be the variety? This argument has lost its zest because we know as a society that change does not come without controversy and dragging many individuals kicking and screaming, Several people had rather long for a past that was not perfect than to envision an uncertain future which could bring about exciting and innovative changes (Beauvoir, 1949).

With the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950’s and anti-war sentiment of the 1960’s, women began to fight for equal rights in the workplace and to have more control over their own bodies. This “Sexual Revolution” as it was called brought about several dynamic changes. In 1963, the Equal Pay Act was passed, in 1964, the Civil Rights Act was amended to include women, abortion was legalized after the celebrated lawsuit *Row vs. Wade*, and the birth control pill became available to most women in the United States. There was also an increased awareness of sexual harassment and domestic violence and the organization NOW helped reestablish the Equal Rights Amendment into legislation (which unfortunately never passed). In 1972, Title IX was passed that forced colleges to offer equality in academics and athletics to women as well as men (Layman, 1995).

Some of the major players in the 1970’s fight for equal rights were Adrienne Rich, a poet and writer committed to the liberation of women. She wrote on oppression, violence, injustice, and anti-Semitism. She also called for women to avoid “shallow solutions” and to “take responsibility for their own education,” (Rich, 1979 pp. 233-234). While advising women to take charge of their education, Rich pleaded with them to reject ideas that personified “feminine weakness, self-denial, and subservience.” She continued
by saying that if women blindly accept the roles in which society has dictated for them, they are in danger of “denying their intelligence,” (Reed & Johnson, p. 149, 2000).

Another key player in the 1970’s was Betty Freidan. She was a writer and social reformer who wrote the book *The Feminine Mystique*, and co-founded NOW in 1966. Gloria Steinham was also a writer, an editor, and social activist who founded The National Women’s Political Caucus in 1971, the same year she launched *Ms. Magazine*. Other noteworthy women of this time period are activist Bella Abzug, a public official of the House of Representatives and co-founder of the National Women’s Caucus along with Shirley Chisholm. Chisholm was also a member of the House of Representatives, and supported the Equal Rights Amendment, and the legalization of abortion (Britannica, 2003).

With the assassination of Dr. King in 1968 and the end of the Vietnam War in the early 1970’s, it appeared that the current revolution was over but radical feminism was on the rise. What occurred next was what historians call the third wave of feminism. This “Third Wave” as it is called overlapped with what was going on in the curriculum field - a major paradigm shift in education, or a “reconceptualization” of the entire field as described by Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2000) in *Understanding Curriculum*. It was this “reconceptualization” that helped sparked the third wave of feminism. Curriculum had been defined as a listing of particular set of courses, the writing of lesson plans, and the setting of goals and objectives not only for learners but also for educators, individual schools, and school systems. During this time period came a shift in the “general mindset or perspective which dictates, in which direction research
might go, what constitutes legitimate knowledge, and who is a legitimate speaker for the field (Pinar, et al., 2000, p. 12).

During the Reconceptualization period, radical feminists began to protest higher institutions for their version of reality which had been mainly a male’s version. In response to this “cry” the development of women’s studies began to emerge at various colleges and universities and women were beginning to learn of the many contributions of prominent women in the field. Female educators and theorists such as Sandra Wallenstein, Janet Miller, Carol Gilligan, and Madeline Grumet influenced the contemporary curriculum field and initiated the critique that helped establish feminist theory. Wallenstein connected autobiographical work with feminist theory and practice. In her paper “The Reflexive Method in Curriculum Theory: An Autobiographical Case Study” (1979b) she gave several suggestions on what constitutes an appropriate direction for gender studies. She stated that gender studies should consist of historical information by analyzing relations in the schools and the curriculum, socioeconomic data that would serve to investigate gender issues as they relate to work status and suitable wages, and psychoanalytic analysis “with respect to sexual relations and body consciousness, (Pinar, et al., 2000, p. 372). Miller coupled feminist theory to curriculum specialists who studied individual’s educational beliefs along with privileged life stories. She also argued for a combination of emotion and intelligence in addition to an exploration into any forms of curriculum that misrepresented or denied women’s educational experiences as a valid concern (Pinar, et al., 2000).

Carol Gilligan is another prominent feminist theorist, who became known through her works in psychology and what could be deemed psychoanalytic feminist theory. After
receiving her doctorate degree at Harvard, she began a teaching career with distinguished
psychologist Erik Erikson. In 1970, she became a research assistant for the renowned
Lawrence Kohlberg who came to notoriety with his six stages of moral development.
Gilligan’s interest in moral dilemmas developed when she began interviewing young
men about the prospect of entering the Vietnam War and young women on the debate
whether to have abortions. Her interest grew into the moral development of adolescent
females realizing that they thought about dilemmas in a different manner than boys did.
In addition, she became conscious of the fact that while Kohlberg created a grand scheme
of moral development, he had only interviewed boys and young men, mostly of the upper
class. Gilligan found that males tended to think more in terms of rules and justice and
females thought more in terms of relationships and caring, thereby judging less since they
see the complexity that comes with the intricacies of relationships. Additionally, she
criticized the fact that “good psychology” does not leave out half the population. This led
her to create her own stages of moral development for females, combining the approaches
of Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg (Gilligan, 2003).

In Gilligan’s most celebrated book, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory
and Women’s Development*, (1982), Gilligan outlines her three stages of moral reasoning
beginning with a selfish or preconventional stage with a concern for self and a sense of
powerless. Stage two is a belief in conventional morality where women characteristically
think of others and value their interests rather than their own. Stage three, the post-
conventional stage, is the point in time where women realize that by denying themselves,
they are, in essence denying others and come to form a middle ground between
selfishness and selflessness as described in Martin Buber’s acclaimed book, *I and Thou,*
(1970), that in order to care for or love others, you must care for or love yourself first. Gilligan does not include ages in her stages of moral development and she states that some women never reach the third stage (Gilligan, 1982).

Grumet is considered one of the most influential theorists of the 1970’s and 1980’s. In her revolutionary work, *Bitter Milk*, Grumet (1988), illustrates the idea that feminist inquiry and phenomenology are not as far apart or exclusive as once thought to be. She states that in the past, feminists have viewed phenomenology as unsophisticated, without a political agenda of any sort, and has rejected the idea of accepting the need for the structure of knowledge on gender or gender studies. In turn, phenomenologists perceive feminists as idealistic in nature, inflicting either political or psychoanalytical agendas on personal accounts of “the things themselves.” Grumet continues by saying that feminists and phenomenologists have a great deal to learn from each other and instead of contradicting or criticizing one another, they could serve to compliment each other. She speaks of “being in the shadows” as teachers and reflecting on our experiences in order to obtain a clearer representation of what it is we have experienced. By combining phenomenology with feminist theory, there is a chance we can reduce the space between what we observe, and what we think we have observed. By ignoring adolescent females with disabilities, we are diminishing their opportunities to put in plain words what is really going on in their lives and consequently, not giving them the support and guidance that is crucial at this juncture in their development.

Grumet also coauthored an article with Lynda Stone titled, “Feminism and curriculum: Getting our act together,” (2000) where they criticize feminism’s road less traveled. They state that, “Poor and working-class women have not received the
economic gains and access to cultural power that feminism has brought to middle class women” (p. 185). They continue by saying that despite a strong agenda like those in the radical 1970’s, feminist theory remains a rather boisterous arena of hope as the deliberations among “self and language, gender and ethnicities, and sexuality and social morality rage on (p. 196).

Currently, practically every feminist has her own description or definition of what they think it means to be a feminist. A basic definition is the idea “that women and men are equal in dignity as human beings” (Bilgrien, p. 13, 1995). Vazquez sums up her frustrations over the lack of a single unique meaning of feminism in these statements:

We can’t even agree on what a ‘Feminist’ is, never mind what she would believe in and how she defines the principles that constitute honor among us. In key with the American capitalist obsession for individualism and anything goes as long as it gets you what you want, feminism in America has come to mean anything you like honey. There are as many definitions of Feminism as there are feminists, some of my sisters say, with a chuckle. I don’t think its funny (Vazquez, in hooks, 2000 p. 18).

Still others define feminism as a political theory that eventually will free all women, including women of color, poor women, young women, old women, women with physical impairments, lesbians, white women, and women of “privilege.” It is also an explanation about women’s position in a society and a political statement focused on gaining equal rights and opportunities for women on changing power relations between men and women (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999).

Sawicki (1991) reminds us that there has been a profound amount of time and energy devoted to the discourse on how women and men vary while the many differences women possess have all been dumped into one big category. Audre Lorde, probably one of the most diverse and powerful writers of our time on issues involving women and their
rights, realizes that even though all women may experience similar tribulations and all suffer from some type of oppression, severity and longevity varies according to class, race, ethnicity, disability, age, and sexual orientation. Lorde poses the question: Should those differences weaken the chances of effective political action or divide loyalties that would serve to pose a threat to a united woman’s movement? She continues by stating that women must put an end to their denial or refusal to admit that such differences exist and that women should even embrace their differences. She believes that:

“How learning to live and struggle with many of our differences may be the key to disarming the power of the white male and middle-class norms which we have all internalized to varying degrees” (Lorde, 1984, p. 34).

bell hooks, a major contributor of the contemporary field of feminist inquiry, defines feminism by what it is and what it is not. She states that feminism is not a movement that is against men, against whites, pro lesbian, or pro abortion. She simply affirms that is a movement to bring an end to sexism, exploitation, and oppression of all women (Parameswaran, 2002). She details her beliefs in her renowned text *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2000), by stating that feminist thought and practice changed dramatically when women of color and white women formed an alliance and started to dispute the perception that gender was the focal point in determining a woman’s fate. She states: “Looking at the intersection of gender, class, and race was the key factor in changing the direction of feminist thought and theory,” (p. xii). She continues by saying that by, ‘hearing the voices of radical thinkers (among them the voices of women of color), the face of feminist theory and practice changed,” (p. xiii). The ability to change direction when necessary has been a main component of strength and energy in the feminist struggle. hooks asserts that “just as our lives are not fixed or
static but always changing, our theory must remain fluid, open, and responsive to new information,” (p. xiii). She continues her stance by emphasizing that feminist thought needs to encompass all women but especially those who have traditionally been excluded. She is adamant that experiences of women who are “on the margin” or those who have been subjugated in any manner must be heard and their plight be addressed and included in the dialogue that could facilitate their liberation. Collins reiterates hook’s thought on this subject in her book *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), where she suggests that knowledge about people who are marginalized, exploited, or who have generally been left out of the conversation, should be obtained by them and with them. She suggests conversation or personal interviewing (phenomenology) as a primary means of gathering knowledge and simple dialogue as a method to close the gap between conflicting viewpoints that make assumptions and generalizations about others rather than creating a genuine knowledge base.

Feminism or feminist theories obviously do not include one single way of thinking but incorporate a wide range of political and theoretical approaches to gaining equal rights for every single member of their gender. These theories also serve as a means in explaining current policies set up by a patriarchal society, and transforming institutional practices that currently serve to oppress women in a variety of ways, beginning in the school setting with the development of females’ educational goals, curriculum, and choices for extracurricular activities – basically their foundation of learning that follows them throughout their lives (demarrais, & LeCompte, 1999).

Females with disabilities are one group, who have been marginalized, excluded, neglected, and cast aside. They are in dire need of their stories to be told and shared.
Research shows that numerous adolescent females have a sense of being silenced, and as a result, they not only lose their voice, but also, lose their identity (Iglesias & Corimer, 2002; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). In Gilligan’s book *Making Connections* (1990), she notes that as females enter this crucial period of adolescence, they experience a loss of self-esteem and begin to doubt their opinions as being valid when viewed by others, especially people of the opposite sex, and then as a result, develop a reluctance to express themselves openly or with any confidence complicating an already delicate situation.

Being female and having a disability could then be twice as problematic and silencing and could compound their problems even further. Many females who have been diagnosed with disabilities are beginning to realize that they are at a double disadvantage and deserve greater equity than they have previously been offered. They face daily obstacles, not only in school, but also in life (Rousso & Wehmeymer, 2001). For these reasons, it is imperative that this type of research be conducted to examine the effects of being placed in an existing male-dominated setting and to see what consequences these effects have on females with disabilities and to detect any emerging themes that may arise in order to better assist them in acquiring an equitable education and a more fulfilling and productive life.

**Methods**

There will be two primary methods of collecting data: observation and interviewing. Both methods of data collection included high school females with moderate to severe learning and/or emotional/behavioral disabilities served in a modified self-contained special education setting (three or more periods a day) in a traditional public high school. The school was located in South Fulton County, Georgia, where
willing and applicable participants were chosen. For the purpose of this study, four female students were selected to assist in this endeavor.

The second and most prominent method of gathering data was interviewing. There were two types of interviews conducted: individual, in-depth interviewing, and phenomenological interviewing. Qualitative in-depth interviewing was conducted one-on-one and assisted the researcher in exploring the participants’ analysis of what it is like being the only girl in the majority of their academic classes and the effects this has on them as they go through their day without a same sex support group and being a minority within a minority. The researcher structured the interview but allowed the participants to answer independently without interjecting her opinion or point of view on the subject matter in question (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The second style of interview used was phenomenological interviewing and is considered an accumulation of other types of interviews. In view of the fact that the theoretical framework in this study was formed through phenomenological inquiry, this form of interviewing seemed natural to use. Since phenomenology is “the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences,” then it is understandable that the rationale for using this interviewing method was to demonstrate the implications of a phenomenon that several people may have in common. Seidman (1998) described the essence of phenomenological interviewing. Three in-depth interviews comprise this approach with the first interview being concerned with past experience, the next interview focusing on current experiences, and then the last interview combining these two sets of experiences describing more fully the females’ thoughts on the phenomenon. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed when each session was completed.
Information from the interviews was promptly reviewed and examined for any recurring themes that began to materialize.

The second data collection method was one of observation. The researcher attended classes of the subjects to gather a wide range of information and use the observational technique of field notes as described by Marshall and Rossman (1999). These notes or recordings of the observations were extremely detailed and nonjudgmental in nature. They were very concrete and served to give specific details on what was observed and to guide future observations, which became more detailed and focused after reviewing notes from beginning observations. Through observations, information was gathered and analyzed after each session was completed. Emerging themes were noted as they surfaced for use in further research in this area.

Coding methods were utilized to assist in this endeavor by including elements such as placing labels on common words or phrases, defining key attributes of recurring themes, describing when and where the theme occurred, along with any descriptors necessary for a more definite detection of the theme, and any examples of helpful or harmful information needed to better establish the theme (Boyatzis, 1998 as cited in Shank, 2002) Separate folders were then be named and the information stored on the researcher’s home computer. Hard copy files were also kept for security and verification purposes. At any time, if participants wanted to review data written about themselves or some experience they had communicated in private, the researcher wanted easy access to that information in order for any of the participants to feel more comfortable about the procedure. This entire process of data collecting and analysis was expected to be very extensive and thorough, therefore took approximately 12 to 16 weeks to complete.
Pugach (2001) stated that when dealing with injustices and equality for all students in special education whether they are Black, Hispanic, poor, or female has eluded a great deal of our literature base. By having these students tell their stories, we begin to let them know that they have meaningful experiences, worthy of sharing, and that they are valuable members of society, not to be simply discarded or silenced. Qualitative research is one of the major techniques that can be used to understand the intricacies of what it means to grow up with multiple disadvantages if a person happens to have a disability, be female, poor, lesbian, and/or of a different race other than White in the United States. By hearing stories from these individuals, educators can gain insights into the diversity they possess, the pain or discomfort that may exist within them, any feelings of alienation and powerlessness as well as any positive ways in which they deal with their unique situation on a daily basis.

This projected research proposal assisted in gathering and analyzing data that can assist in putting the trend of special education classes being only sprinkled with females into a historical perspective. This research study also served as a means to explore what affects the phenomenon of being “the only girl in class” had on females’ academic performance and their socialization skills as well as to identify any emerging themes that may be relevant for living and maintaining an autonomous existence. It described their experiences in a manner that would be beneficial, enlightening, and liberating not only to them but also to significant others - personal and professional. Finally, the research assisted in reducing a gap of knowledge that has neglected approximately 25% of the special education population for too many years.
“A study focusing on individual lived experiences typically relies on an in-depth interview strategy…to capture the deep meaning of experience in their own words” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.61).

The participants of this study were four female students attending a traditional public high school in South Fulton County, Georgia. All four girls were between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, had previously been identified as having a learning disability or emotional/behavioral disorder, been in special education a minimum of four years and were served in a self-contained model (three or more classes a day in a small group setting). They were often times the only female in their classes but occasionally reported having one other female in the room and on extreme occasion two other females. They all reported having more girls in their electives and/or any classes they took in a collaborative model team-taught than in their special education classes.

Since this study used minors as research participants, the researcher submitted a proposal for review to the Institutional Review Board of Georgia Southern University, which they approved before research, began as required by university policies when research requires the use of human subjects (Appendix A-B). All of the participants, parents of minor aged participants, and the principal of the high school where the research took place, signed informed consent letters (Appendix C-F) as provided by the researcher and outlined by the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board.

The interviews took place at the participants’ high school and were conducted privately in an available classroom during the school day within the first three months
of the 2005-2006 school year. All the girls participated in three – four sessions for approximately 30 minutes each giving responses to a set of twenty-five predetermined questions (Appendix G). The researcher interviewed each girl individually about their school experiences and being one of the few females and often times the only female in several of their classes. They were encouraged to expand on any or all of the questions whenever they felt comfortable enough to share added personal information. The researcher also observed each girl formally in her special and general education classes throughout the school day.

The researcher then reviewed and coded their responses to the interview questions and results of the observations in relation to each research question. The three main questions addressed in this study were: 1) How does being in a male-dominated setting most of the school day affect girls’ academic performance? 2) How does being in male-dominated program affect girls’ socialization skills? 3) What themes to be outlined for further research may possibly emerge from the girls’ thoughts, descriptions, and feelings about their awareness of being “the only girl in class” in special education classes? Sample interview questions and their responses are included within each section; the author reported observation findings at the end of this chapter.
Interviews

Research Question 1

“The primary advantage of phenomenological interviewing is that it permits an explicit focus on the researcher’s personal experience combined with those of the interviewees” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 113)

The first research goal addressed the participants’ perceptions of their academic ability and success through classes attended, grades, credits attained, diploma selection, and how many portions of the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) they had passed where appropriate (for 11th grade and higher pursuing a regular education diploma). Motivation level toward reaching their goals was also a factor in helping to determine academic success along with how they managed to receive assistance in meeting their academic needs. The researcher also assessed their plans after high school along with who “keeps them going” or provides a major influence in their lives from the interview questions. The researcher hypothesized that by being in an extremely minority situation by being one of or the only female in class would have certain consequences and those could influence their academic success.

The research revealed that overall each participant was on track for graduation, earning the required number of credits needed each semester required for their grade level (although some failing grades were reported but not enough to place them off track). The only exception was Gracie, who was only in the ninth grade and had not received a report card at the high school level as of yet (she reported passing 4 out of 6 classes on her last progress report). All participants reported being motivated to make good grades and to graduate from high school, had one or more persons in their life who
was a major influence on them and their success, and all participants verbalized definite plans they had made for continuing their education after high school.

All four participants, Brandy, Kelly, CC, and Gracie, responded to the question, “Where do you think you learn best, in your smaller classes (special education) or your larger classes (general education and/or team taught classes)?” Three out of four girls expressed that they thought they learned better in the smaller classroom especially when it came to reading but the fourth participant, Kelly responded by saying “…in my larger classes because there are a bunch of people in there to help me.” Brandy stated that while she thought she learned better in a small group, the curriculum should be more strenuous in order to resemble that of the regular education curriculum to better prepare special education students for the graduation test, and “use the same books but just go slower.”

The second question that addressed academic performance asked specifically about the girls’ grades. The interviewer discovered that Gracie failed two classes on her last progress report – the same was true of Kelly’s current performance but she did say that her grades were improving and should all be at the passing mark before the next report. Brandy was passing all classes and CC stated that she was passing only two of her classes. When asked why she was failing so many classes, CC responded by saying, “I don’t pay attention in class and I do not do well on the tests.” She also reported sometimes she “lost her work” and then she would not get credit for doing it.

A comparison of teachers’ academic expectations for girls and boys was the basis of the next interview question. The researcher found that the answer to this question was unanimous for all participants. Every female felt as if their teachers expected the same
level of academic success from all of their students. As Kelly put it, “They just all want us to pass.” No one described any difference in expectations from their teachers in a small group setting versus a large group setting. Brandy stated that all her teachers expected her to learn the material and to do the best she could no matter what type of classroom it was.

When asked about their comfort level in each of their classes - how comfortable they felt about reading, answering questions aloud, asking for help, etc. the research exposed a variety of answers. Brandy responded by saying that in her regular education classes – her electives, she does not feel comfortable reading aloud and is hesitant to answer questions verbally since as she put it, “I get nervous because there is people in there who are my friends and don’t know I’m in special education and I get frustrated because I don’t know the answer. Then if I say I don’t know it, I feel stupid.” She had a different reaction when asked about her comfort level in the special education classes. Brandy simply said that she didn’t mind reading aloud in those classes and when asked to answer oral questions in front of the class, she wasn’t timid in the least declaring, “…in special education it doesn’t matter if you get it wrong because they probably don’t know either.”

CC’s responses were similar to Brandy’s answers given in the fact that she stated she never volunteers to answer questions or read aloud in any of her classes but if she is called upon she will attempt a response. She continued by talking about having to do presentations in both types of classes (small group and large group) and how nervous that made her. In her Home Economics class, she presented with a partner. When the researcher asked if that made it easier or less stressful she replied, “No, that person was
slower than me.” I then asked what she meant by slow and CC stated, “She didn’t understand what she was supposed to say and I had to help her out.” She said when she had to present in her smaller group classes she was much more comfortable since there were less people in those classes.

**Gracie** had the same type of reaction to this question as well. The researcher inquired if she would feel at ease giving a verbal response to a teacher’s question in her classes. She found that **Gracie** felt this way about the subject, “If I know them (the other students) real good, I will answer if I want to but if I don’t then I won’t.” When asked if she answered more questions in her large or small group classes, she revealed this information, “I don’t even read aloud in the large group.” **Gracie** also reported feeling intimidated academically in the large group setting and even though she had stated earlier that special education was like being babied, she responded to this reminder by saying, “Yeah, but in a way I like to be babied. I have a hard time with the work sometimes in my large groups.”

**Kelly’s** responses were a little different in the fact that she reported feeling comfortable asking questions and reading aloud in all classes with the exception of her math class which she took in a small group setting. She stated that, “If it is math, I do not like math so I prefer not to answer any math questions because that is not my subject. Any other subject I feel comfortable answering.” She also reported that her comfort level increased with certain teachers and certain classes. **Kelly** acknowledged the fact that she had built a trusting rapport with some of her teachers and that made a difference in her comfort level. Although responses varied according to comfort level, all four participants
stated that when it came to seeking help on assignments and/or tests, they were not
inhibited to request help from any of their teachers.

The next question that pertained to academic success asked the participants about
their attendance in school and in classes. CC reported that she came to school almost
every day but skipped certain classes periodically throughout the school day. She also
reported having to go to in school suspension on a couple of occasions because she either
skipped class or was tardy for class too often. Kelly gave comparable information
revealing that, “I have good attendance but some days I am late and I have to go to sweep
– that is where we have to sit in the cafeteria all period instead of going to class and every
now and then I skip class but not that much anymore since I am older.”

Brandy did not state that she skipped classes but admitted to skipping school
occasionally. She stated, “I mess up usually at the end of the year because at the
beginning of the year you are trying to do good, going to classes and everything but then
your friends pressure you to do things like go to the mall or go and visit another friend
even when you had intentions of going to school that day.” Gracie reported missing nine
days this school year – one when she was sick, another when her brother was coming
home from out of town, and then seven days due to suspension for two separate fights.
She also said that she sometimes has to go to the cafeteria when she is late for class and
has skipped only a couple of classes all year long. Regarding the work she misses, she
explained, “If I miss any of my classes, I make sure I make up my work”

The next set of questions dealt with the girls’ motivational levels toward school in
general and their individual classes. The interviewer found that all participants expressed
the desire to do well, pass her classes, and graduate. Although Brandy admitted to not
being as motivated in her special education classes as she was in her electives or general education classes she gave a viable reason for her feelings. As she put it, “I want to do better in my regular education classes because I want to prove to them that I can be there, so I try to do more work or the same work and I really don’t care in my special education classes if I get things wrong because everybody else probably got it wrong too. I do not have high expectations of myself in special education.”

**Kelly** described her motivational level a little differently than **Brandy** did. She stated that if it was a subject she did not like, such as math, she was not very motivated to do well but if she liked the subject and/or the teacher, she would try harder. She made this comment during one of her interviews, “There are some things I do not like doing and then some things I get the hang of but if I don’t know how to do it, I will refuse to do it. If I know how to do it, I’m going to do it.” **Kelly** also expressed that she is more motivated in her larger classes and stated that she tried harder in her business class since, “I am working toward a scholarship. I would love to go to college – I would be the first to go in my family.”

**CC** revealed similar emotions when asked about motivational levels in different classes. While she expressed the desire to make all A’s, she admitted being motivated less in classes she did not like such as literature and physical science reporting that those classes were boring and there was too much reading. **CC** stated that she was more motivated in classes she liked such as her business and math classes – one class was a small group setting (math) and the other class was a large group setting (computer applications). She felt like those were extra challenging for her but the classes were more
interesting and therefore she paid extra attention to the teacher and completed a greater number of assignments.

Gracie was very clear in her explanation of how motivation played a role in her schooling process. She revealed that she wanted to make good grades in order to finish school and “be the first person in her family to graduate from high school.” When the researcher inquired in which classes she tried the hardest, her responses were similar to Brandy’s answers in the regard that she was more motivated or tried harder in her regular education classes. Gracie stated, “I want to do well in all my classes but I guess I am trying to prove that I can do the work in the regular classes.”

After talking about motivation, the interviewer asked the participants to “Tell me who and/or what has provided the largest influence on your academic performance at school.” All responses supported the fact that every one had at least one person who provided continued encouragement and most participants could name more than one major influence. After much thought, Brandy finally concluded that her study skills teacher had the biggest influence on her stating, “…I really like her a lot because it seems like she tries to be good at everything and to try to make sure all her work is done to the best of her ability. She is a nice lady and she tries to help me with my work for all of my classes. I have several other teachers who influence me also.”

The interviewer posed the same question to CC, and she responded quickly by saying, “I motivate myself.” I commended her for doing so and then asked if anyone else influenced her to do well in school. She told of a particular teacher who taught her literature. While she verbalized a dislike for the class since she did not like reading, she spoke very fondly of her literature teacher and wanting to please her by “doing the best
she could.” CC also reported that her father had a huge influence on her by persuading her to “do well in school and stop playing games.” She said that her father took a strong interest in her schoolwork and she wanted to make him proud.

Kelly named her mother as the biggest influence on her academic success. She said that her mother wanted her to be the first one in their family to finish school and “not be like her and quit.” Gracie also revealed that her mother “dropped out of school in the ninth grade when she got pregnant with my brother.” She added, “My father dropped out, I think in middle school because his Mom was real sick and he had to help her. My Papa dropped out and my grandmother too. My older brother just quit school last year and my little sister is still in elementary school.” She stated that the only person in her family to graduate had been “my brother, Reed – but he is my stepbrother.” These set of circumstances and her mother are what Gracie claimed motivated her the most but her Papa also made a huge impact on her and persuaded her to excel in school. She said he was constantly encouraging her to do well and to reach her goals.

Other research supports what these young women have reported. When girls can associate with individuals who can personally identify with them, recognize their strengths, and give them the support they need, they are more likely to develop the self-assurance needed to pursue career goals that enables them to become self-sufficient (Viadero, 1998).

One of the last sets of questions relevant to academic performance pertained to the participants’ plans after high school. The investigator found that each participant emphatically expressed her plans to graduate from high school and three out of four of them had precise ideas on what they wanted to do after high school. Brandy
communicated that she intended to “be a counselor for teens because one of my teachers told me I would be good at it since I like listening to other people’s problems and helping them out but I’m not sure cause I don’t know if I am going to pass all parts of the graduation test or not. I may not be able to go to college but if I don’t I would still like to work with troubled teenagers in some way.”

Kelly reported that she initially had wanted to go to college but probably would attend technical school instead since she had not passed all portions of the graduation test and had opted for a special education diploma and then upgrade to a GED. She stated she was interested in pursuing a career in either cosmetology or massage therapy. Kelly also said that she wanted to get married but had no intention on her husband being the sole provider. She strongly expressed the desire to be independent and in order to do so she realized she needed proper training and a suitable profession.

Although Gracie was only in the ninth grade, she gave definite ideas on what she wanted to do after reaching her long anticipated goal of graduating from high school. When asked about her plans she said, “I want to graduate and go to college to be either a veterinarian or animal cop. There are some colleges in Douglasville that me and my brother checked out.” Gracie went on to talk about her love of animals and the pets she had now. It was impressive to the researcher that she had already checked out possible schools she could attend in the nearby area.

CC’s response exposed that she was the only participant who was unsure of her plans after high school. She articulated her desire to graduate from high school but admitted to currently not giving a career much thought. CC was only a sophomore and scheduled for a career technical diploma. Her vocational preparation had just begun and
she was not required to choose a career path until the end of her tenth grade to begin the 2006-2007 school year. She did display an interest in being in education in some respect when exploring possible occupations.

Near the end of the interview, participants responded to the question, “Who do you go to for academic guidance?” The researcher discovered that every participant replied essentially in the same manner – a particular teacher with whom each had established a trusting and supportive rapport. Kelly and CC also reported that they frequently go to friends for help when possible. The researcher then inquired about whether they utilized the counselor’s services when needed. Information revealed that none of the participants expressed any rapport with any of the counselors and reported that they barely even knew who their counselor was. Gracie had strong feelings about visiting the counseling office stating, “…they just say they will help you or they will say how do you feel about that? I just think that they think they know but they really don’t.” Kelly responded much in the same manner describing a poor relationship with her counselor but was able to tell me several ways she addressed her needs whether they were academic in nature or problems of a different sort. When the interviewer asked Kelly who she sought for guidance she responded with this summation, “If I need help with my schedule I go to one of my teachers, if I need tutoring, I go to the Skills Tutoring program after school, and if I need help with a personal problem then I go see the social workers, a friend, or one of my favorite teachers who I trust.”

The last question asked in the interview process related directly to the first research question. Each participant responded to this statement, “Tell me if you feel that your academic performance would improve if there were more girls in each of your
classes.” The analysis of this question yielded a range of unexpected results. Brandy answered the question with confidence. She said, “I don’t think it matters, it shouldn’t be about your surroundings. It should be about paying attention – not who is in the class, but if more girls were in class with me I might get less done and that could affect my grades.” Kelly’s reply was much like Brandy’s answer initially but she had a different perspective about the prospect of having more girls in the classroom. She stated, “My academic performance wouldn’t change because I’m still independent. I don’t like working in groups but if more girls were in the room I would feel more at ease and worry less about being taken advantage of by the boys and probably think more about my lessons.” CC and Gracie had similar answers in the fact that they both felt as if more girls would only complicate matters or as CC put it when I asked her if she wished she had more girls in her classes she said, “No, because I’m just… I just don’t want any other girls in my class because they start stuff.” Gracie’s responses corresponded with the three other participants by saying, “I don’t think it would be no different and it may even be worse because they may try me. If there were more girls in the room chances are I wouldn’t get along with them because girls keep up a lot of stuff.” She added, “If by chance there were more girls in the room that I did get along with, I probably would socialize with them too much and not get my work done, plus if they are not starting drama they may have drama in their lives and I probably would be a part of that.” The researcher then asked if they thought being with boys most of the school day hindered them in any way. All four participants disclosed similar thoughts by declaring that they felt their academic performance remained constant despite this phenomenon. Maintaining a certain level of academic achievement is imperative for these young women since research indicates that
when academic problems become too complicated, females may begin to camouflage their difficulties through actions of a delinquent nature such as truancy, smoking, drinking, drug use, and/or sexual promiscuity (Nadeau, 2002). In addition once they become part of the juvenile justice system their chances of receiving a high school diploma decreases greatly as reported by The American Correctional Association (1990).

Research Question 2

The second research goal addressed the development of participants’ socialization skills including how well they handled difficult situations, how they got along with their teachers and peers, to what degree they were involved in the total school program, the number of times they had been suspended (in and out of school), and assessed how their needs were being met socially. The researcher hypothesized that by being one of the few and sometimes the only female in class could have a significant effect on them. Evaluation of their responses while in the interview sessions demonstrated four rather impressive independent young women who despite problematic circumstances have managed to maintain friendships with peers and build appropriate relationships with the adults in their lives, deal with daily adversity, and on an average suspended only minimally. Every participant was able to verbalize certain people with whom she confided on a regular basis when she was in need of support. The only behavior where the participants differed significantly was their involvement in the total school program. Only one student spoke of her participation in extra curricular activities. Other participants discussed their desire to be a part of activities outside the classroom but explained reasons they declined to participate.
Every participant had an answer for the first question the researcher asked about intimidation in the classroom. **Brandy** gave a good example when she told this story, “I was in one teacher’s class and I was the only girl in there. I think it was in the 8th grade and the teacher left and I had to be in charge of the class and they wouldn’t listen to me and you know how that goes. I am skinny and short and they are not going to listen to a girl, they are like whatever, shut-up. I felt very intimidated.” **Kelly** had a similar experience in “4th or 5th grade. She relayed this story, “In elementary school I was intimidated because they didn’t like me and thought that they were better than me and could do whatever they wanted but I faced the fact that no one is better than me.” She conveyed another story that occurred her junior year in high school when a male classmate accused her of calling him a racial name and then proceeded to threaten to “kick her ass.” I asked her how she handled this situation and she told me, “I just sat back and didn’t say anything because he was the one who would get into trouble, not me but it does make me feel uncomfortable at times.” **CC** reported that she had never really felt any type of overt intimidation and **Gracie** stated that the only time she felt truly intimidated was when there was another girl in the class and the boys would “try and act hard or whatever.” She continued by saying, “If there was another girl in the class the boys showed out more and then the other girl may want to show off for them by trying to intimidate me or make smart remarks.”

Even though **Gracie** said she really did not feel intimidated by the boys in her classes, she shared several stories of sexual harassment. One story that stood out in her mind was one of the first times a boy approached her in an inappropriate sexual manner. She reported that he walked up to her and said, “Hey girl, do you want to suck my… you
know.” The researcher asked her how she dealt with statements such as this and she replied, “When it first started happening I went home and told my mom and she was like, ‘well you have an older brother’ and she is like a person who says kids are kids and she is not the kind that would go to school and press charges. She told me that I needed to say something to them and that is what I did and it did get better. I asked Gracie if this type of behavior continued and she explained that ‘only once in a blue moon,’ but if it does I usually just roll my eyes at them and tell them they need to respect me better than that.”

In one study, seventh and eighth grade girls reported being harassed almost on a daily basis but ironically blamed themselves for the actions. Most of the girls felt as if there was no point in telling anyone because nothing would happen. It appeared as if the girls were unaware that they had the right not to be treated in this manner (Orenstein, 1994). Other research data shows that sexual harassment in schools is more prevalent for girls than boys and findings were similar across all ethnic groups. Over 30% of females, experiencing cases of sexual harassment reported not wanting to return to school afterwards. Significant adults including parents, teachers, and administrators need to realize the seriousness of these behaviors and that such acts create an environment that inhibits learning and compromises the education of our females students – society’s daughters (AAUW 1993).

The next set of questions pertained to the amount of attention the participants received from teachers and from peers. The research uncovered that overall each participant felt the same way about how much attention they received versus how much the boys received. Brandy described the attention she received from the boys in the class as, “positive and negative because being the only girl guys look at you but it is kind of
negative because you want someone to relate to you and don’t want to be the only girl in
there and feeling all awkward.” She also expressed the notion that no matter what type of
class she was in, “boys get more attention because they are louder and need the most
help.” **CC** described the attention she received from teachers much in the same way as
**Brandy** did. She felt as if the teachers gave boys more attention than the girls in her
small and large group classes although she could not give a plausible reason why this
occurred. As for as attention from the boys in the class, she stated that when there was
only one or two females in the class, the boys usually talked about “guy things.” When
asked, “What kind of ‘guy things’?” she answered, “like they want somebody to do this
and do that.” The researcher then inquired if this type of “attention” bothered her, she
responded, “I just stay quiet and don’t pay attention to them.”

The researcher found that a couple of participants had a different take on the
subject. **Gracie** felt a little differently because she said she thought she received more
attention from her teachers in her special education classes because, “they try and include
me in things” but received less attention in her larger classes such as JROTC and team
taught health and biology. She did not sense that the boys gave her any added attention
but she did admit that she liked “working alone” and that she usually just “kept to
herself” unless she was put in a group of some sort. **Kelly** expressed the same sentiments
when it came to attention in the classroom. She initially reported seeing no difference in
the attention she got as compared to others. She said, “I really don’t seek any attention, I
am just laid back to myself, I don’t like working in groups either.” When I asked her,
“Why not?” she said because “if I work in groups then I tend to talk, if I don’t work in
groups I will get more work done.” After a couple of minutes of thought, **Kelly** added
that in the classes with predominately boys, they got more attention “because they are always getting into arguments and fussing.” In my regular education classes, my teachers can give me more attention because there are not a bunch of people being immature: arguing, cursing, and all that which is not necessary.”

The researcher then analyzed responses involving a comparison of teachers’ behavioral expectations between boys and girls; three out of four participants reacted in similar fashion. They felt as if behavioral expectations varied greatly between boys and girls. As Brandy put it, “I think the teachers think the girls should be more calmed down and they just expect the guys to act stupid because they always see that. I think it should all be equal but the guys always act stupid so that is why the teachers expect it.” In her summation of what she thought her teachers expected from girls, Brandy stated, “I think they expect a girl to sit down, do her work, and when she is finished then she can talk…some girls are not like that because they mess up, sometimes I mess up too.”

The research indicated that two of the participants thought teachers’ expectations differed greatly among students. CC said overall her teachers expected everyone to be quiet and do their work but when I posed the question, “Do you think your teachers expect girls to act differently than the boys?” she answered, “Yes, they expect girls to be calmer and not so loud.” Kelly expressed her feelings much in the same manner saying, “Teachers expect students to be on their best behavior at all times but they only expect the guys not to fight and the girls not to fight or curse because it is bad for us… not womanlike.”

The researcher discovered that one participant saw no difference in expectations of teachers but expected all students to behave. Gracie was the only participant who felt
as if teachers’ behavioral expectations did not differ among boys and girls. When asked the question, “How do your teachers expect you to behave?” she responded, “Just come in the room and if they don’t have anything on the board for you to do go ahead and do another task or wait for them to announce it and then just do your work.” Gracie reported no differences in expectations nor did she think teachers showed any favoritism toward girls or boys.

After discussing behavioral expectations, the researcher asked each participant about suspensions and discipline issues. She found that all four participants expressed similar views. When Brandy was asked, “Who gets disciplined more in your classes?” she responded, “I think boys because they mostly want to hit each other, play around, and talk instead of doing their work. Girls get disciplined too but they will not act up as much in front of the teachers because they are smart.” She also said, “Guys fight more because they get mad and do stupid stuff but the girls usually just argue.” Brandy reported that she had never been suspended but said she was surprised because, “I do have a mouth on me.”

Kelly described much of the same scenario in her classes. She said, “The boys get disciplined more… across the board. They usually get sent to the office for fighting, disrespect, or using profanity – stuff like that.” The researcher inquired if she received discipline referrals to the office. She replied, “Yes, just last week I got into it with a boy in one of my classes for telling the teacher something that was untrue. I had to go to ISS for two days.” I then asked her if this was routine or something that happened only occasionally. She responded with, “I get into arguments with girls sometimes but I don’t
fight them and usually when I get into it with guys, it is only verbal. He just made me so
mad by trying to start a rumor about me.”

CC responded just as the previous two participants had. She stated, “Boys get into
more trouble in the classroom and get sent to the office more often than the girls do.”
When asked why she thought this was the case she told me, “…because they are childish
and like to play games.” I then asked CC, “Do you ever get into trouble or sent to the
office?” She told me she had been in ISS two times this school year: once for being late
to class too many times and once for throwing a rock at a boy and hitting him in the head
after he made a smart remark to her. CC said while in class she usually keeps to herself
and “don’t bother nobody.”

Gracie’s take on the subject was much the same as every one else’s. She said,
“The boys get written up more for being loud and always talking about gangs and stuff
like that.” She admitted to being suspended several times while in middle school for
fighting and skipping classes but since she had been in high school, she only had three
suspensions: one for smoking (ISS) and two for fighting (OSS). She acknowledged
skipping one or two classes (without being caught) and being late a few times but there
had not been any repercussions for these infractions.

The next issue the researcher addressed was assertiveness. She asked, “Do you
feel the need to be more assertive in some classes than others?” The research showed that
first three out four participants needed the word assertive defined. The researcher
explained it this way: “Assertiveness means sticking up for yourself or someone else and
saying what’s on your mind.” Brandy then asked if I meant with teachers and I told her,
“No, mostly with the students.” She then replied, “Yes, there is this boy in one of my
classes...he is always making fun of other people and I tell him you don’t look so good
yourself. I can talk junk; I don’t like to fight but I don’t like it when people talk bad about
me or other people.” She reported that she did feel comfortable in taking a stand like the
one she described and she said, “Yes, I do feel comfortable. Sometimes they listen to me
and shut up but I let them know I really don’t care what they think and I’m not going to
worry about it.”

Research revealed that Kelly also felt comfortable standing up for herself but she
usually let the teacher intervene first but “if they don’t handle it then I will take it up in
my own manner.” She gave an example in her first period class of a boy who anytime she
asked or answered a question out loud; he mocked her or laughed at her. “I just let that
kind of thing go or I tell him, hey you don’t even know me like that.” She continued by
saying, “but if they say something negative about my family or something of a serious
nature, I will take it into my own hands.”

CC did not give any specific examples of a time when she needed to be assertive
in her classes but she proclaimed that she would have no problem speaking up for herself
if anyone said something that was inappropriate, rude, or made her feel uncomfortable in
any way. Gracie also articulated how she had no problem speaking up for herself. She
stated, “In my team taught classes, there are more girls in there and there are more people
talking and showing out.” The researcher then asked about the sexual comments she had
referred to earlier. Gracie replied, “It still happens sometimes but they are just stupid
comments. As long as it is just them saying stuff I can handle it but if they touch me, my
mom would handle it or I would tell the teacher. I have always been taught to stick up for
myself.”
One of the last questions involving the students’ social behavior concerned the girls’ involvement in extracurricular activities. The research uncovered that only one out of four participants was active in after school activities. Brandy stated that she did not belong to a club or participate in any sport because it affected her schoolwork and she already missed too many days by staying at home so often and, as a result, she knew she needed to concentrate on her schoolwork. Kelly said that she belonged to the drama club in middle school but since entering high school, she had not participated in any after school activities except a tutoring program. CC reported that she was not interested in being in any kind of sport but she said, “I would join a club if my friends did so I would have someone to chat with.” Gracie was the only participant who told of several extracurricular activities in which she was interested. In middle school, she reported that she had been a cheerleader for one year but then quit in order to join the basketball team. Since entering ninth grade at the high school level, she also reported joining the drama club and the swim team. Although most of the participants were not involved in many organizations, they all felt as if girls had as many opportunities as the boys did at school with the exception of football, but Kelly did say, “Last year we had a female kicker on the football team.” Brandy responded to the question, “Do you feel like you have as many opportunities as the boys in school?” by saying “Yeah, I think so, I think we are all pretty much equal – it is just like the guys think we are not as smart as them because we are girls or something like that.”

At the end of the interview, each participant was asked to “Tell me if you think you would attend more classes, get into less trouble, or be more involved with the total school program if you had more girls in class with you.” The researcher found that three
out of four participants responded directly to this question in a somewhat surprising manner. **Brandy** replied, “I think it might hurt me because if more girls were in my classes, I would probably talk more, get into more trouble, and get less work done. **CC** simply stated that she did not think having more girls in class would be a benefit to her and then she added, “Especially if your boyfriend is in there you don’t have to worry about being jealous because you get all of his attention.” **Gracie** had the same mindset when asked her opinion on the subject. She explained it this way, “Actually, if I had more girlfriends in class with me, I might be more tempted to skip class if they suggested it or wanted me to but since I am with mostly guys, I don’t worry about that because I wouldn’t skip class or school with guys. **Kelly’s** only response to this statement was that she may be more involved with the total school program “because I wouldn’t feel out of place if there were more females I knew in the clubs I wanted to join.”

The last question I asked each participant was, “Do you think being with males most of the school day hinders you from achieving or behaving the best you can?” and “How?” The researcher found that two out of four students, **Brandy** and **Gracie** responded quickly and exactly in the same manner by replying, “Not at all.” **CC** thought she may talk less with mostly boys in the classroom with her but she felt overall, it did not have much of an effect on her. Data analysis showed that **Kelly** was the only participant who seemed to be concerned over this phenomenon. She answered the question by saying, “It hinders be a bunch because I feel like I miss out on the girl stuff and become more like the boys and my mama and papa would like for me to be more feminine but I’m not since I am around boys all day long and have been most of my life.”
I think I also get into more trouble when I am around more guys because I tend to act like them – cursing, smoking, fighting and society don’t like females to act that way.”

Research Question 3

“Themes do not really emerge from the data. What emerges, after much hard work and creative thought, is an awareness in the mind of the researcher that there are patterns of order that seem to cut across various aspects of the data. When these patterns become organizationed, and when they characterize different segments of data, then we call them themes” (Shank, 129).

The third research goal addressed emerging themes relevant for future research that presented themselves through the interview responses about the girl’s experiences of their placement in such a minority situation throughout the school day. The researcher believed that these young women’s stories would make them more aware of their present situation, empower them to take more of an active role in their educational process, and enlighten teachers, administrators, and all school personnel on ways to provide a more equitable education for females with disabilities. By telling their stories, they could begin to feel more appreciated by giving them a positive and healthier self-image, and a stronger vision of possible opportunities.

Several themes surfaced during the course of the interviews that may be useful in understanding the plight of these young women and what direction future research on this group of students should take. The most apparent commonalities the researcher identified consisted of the following categories, lack of attention from teachers, intimidation from male classmates, school/class attendance issues, relationships with female peers, academic discomfort, scrutiny of special education, unawareness of minority placement/resistance to change, and self-esteem.
Lack of Attention from Teachers

Analyzed data revealed that all four participants expressed the belief that they received less attention from teachers in one way or another. While Gracie revealed that she thought her teachers in the special education classes gave her an adequate amount of attention, she admitted that in her larger classes, her electives and team-taught classes, she definitely received less attention from the teachers. All of the other participants felt the same way but made the distinction clearer in their special education classes. The female students maintained the position that in classes where their classmates were predominately boys, they received considerable less attention than the boys did.

Although most of the participants claimed that they liked working alone and required little attention, three out of four of them gave several reasons why the boys demanded so much of their teachers’ time and energy. Brandy felt as if boys got more attention in all classes because “they are louder and need the most help.” CC seemed to feel the same way and made the comment, “When there are only one or two females in the class, they dominate the conversation talking about guy things or nasty stuff.” She felt that is why teachers paid them so much attention – to keep them on task and out of trouble. Kelly shared the same sentiments evident with these remarks, “When there are mostly boys in the classroom they get more attention because they are always fussing and getting into arguments.” Kelly gave reasons why she could receive more attention in her electives. She stated, “In my regular education classes… there are not a bunch of guys being immature, arguing, cursing, and all that which is unnecessary.”
The literature review was consistent with what these girls experienced. Sadker & Sadker (1994) reported that while teachers may not be aware that they give boys more attention and devote more time to their academic and behavioral needs, it sends a hidden message to the females sitting in class with them. The message that girls are second-rate citizens receiving a second rate education, although it may be covert in its transmission, is heard loud and clear. One reason this message is so dangerous is the notion that girls become numb to this type of treatment and by blindly accepting that they do not need or deserve equal attention can permeate every portion of their lives – personally and professionally.

**Intimidation from Male Classmates**

The researcher found that while a couple of participants could give blatant examples of intimidation from male classmates, all four participants described related feelings of uneasiness or pressure of some sort from being the only or one of the few females in their small group classes. **Gracie** was probably the most outspoken of all the participants in her personal accounts of intimidation ranging from bullying type behaviors to endless descriptions of sexual harassment. Although there were several incidents she was willing to share, she seemed almost detached from the behavior – even accepting. She made excuses for them with comments like, “boys will be boys, they are in those classes for their behavior, and they usually act a fool - always getting into trouble.”

**Kelly** was also very candid about the amount of intimidation she felt in the classroom especially when she was the only girl in class, which for **Kelly** was practically all day since she only had only one elective and was making up an academic class she
had previously failed. She told stories of being threatened, made fun of, and sexually harassed. During one part of the interview, she expressed this sentiment, “… it is like you are the only girl in there, then there are all these guys, and I think, oh, when is it going to end?” She continued by saying that she felt uncomfortable hearing all “the stuff” they liked to talk about as well, especially when they tried to pull her into the conversation and ask her questions of an extremely private nature. Kelly also added this scenario about her level of comfort in a classroom with mostly boys, “… sometimes the teacher leaves the room and I feel very uncomfortable being the only girl.” She conveyed two main concerns, “What if they try to do something and there is no one to defend me?” or … “say if the guys hit me or do something that I don’t feel like doing, I would be in there by myself with no one else to see what happened.”

CC reported that her experiences of being the only or one of the few girls in certain classes was negative. When asked, “How?” she replied, “It’s bad; I think it is just bad.” She declined to give specific examples but she did add, “Sometimes when there are just a couple of girls they (the boys) are always talking about their stuff – they tend to talk about guy things.” Although she said it really did not bother her because she usually “kept to herself,” she continued to speak on this subject without much prompting. She added, “When boys talk they usually talk about nasty stuff.”

Brandy explained her view of intimidation in another fashion. She felt as though because she was “skinny and short,” that the guys did not listen to her when she talked and had a habit of “trying to run over her.” Similar to the way CC depicted her relationship with the boys in her classes, Brandy claimed, “Its okay, I guess - being in there with mostly guys but it is very awkward at times.” When asked, “How?” she
responded, “I do know all the guys in there but it would just be better if there was another
girl because you feel lonely and what if the teacher leaves and they try to molest you or
something.” Even though Brandy quickly said, “just kidding,” the researcher believed
that she had reason to think about this event just as Kelly had shared previously.

School/Class Attendance Issues

The research uncovered that even though detailed reasons were not cited other
than boredom and peer pressure, all four participants reported missing time out of school
and class – not just this year but in years past as well. Kelly and CC stated even though
they came to school almost every day, they missed individual classes by skipping or by
being tardy and then reporting to “sweep” which as they described consisted of going to
the cafeteria for the period they were tardy without a pass. Both of these participants also
reported missing class sometimes due to in school suspension placement.

Gracie stated that she came to school on a regular basis also but missed more
days because of suspensions (in and out of school). She also reported skipping class
every now and then and having to spend time in “sweep” as well. The reason she gave for
being late to class were “Sometimes I just don’t feel like being bothered or I have work I
need to make up.” Gracie admitted to skipping school occasionally but mostly while she
was in middle school.

Brandy confessed to skipping school frequently or “just not going when I don’t
feel like it.” She acknowledged the fact that she knew her absences had caused her
problems in the past and she was trying to “do the right thing” and come to school more
often. She did admit that once she was at school she presently went to all of her classes
and had not missed any days due to suspension - in or out of school in the last couple of
years. Both **Brandy** and **Gracie** shared the same attitude when asked about whom they chose to hang out with when they skipped school. They reported that they would not skip with guys even though they were friends with many boys, they did not feel comfortable skipping school with them and realized the possible risks involved.

*Relationships with Female Peers*

Another common theme that began to emerge during the interview sessions was how some of the participants viewed other females and their descriptions of their relationships with them. All four participants described friendships they had built and with the exception of a female friend, here or there the majority of their friends were boys. Initially the students interviewed spoke of their desire to have more girls and friends in the classroom but after much thought, and several questions later, two out of four gave precise reasons why they felt being friends with females just caused additional problems in an already strenuous situation.

**CC** talked about how girls needed the most help with their attitudes toward each other and that she shies away from having too many female friends because they “start too much stuff and keep up too much drama.” **Gracie** seemed concerned about the same issue but she articulated it a bit differently saying, “I feel girls bully other girls more often than boys do and there needs to be a program of some kind here at school to help with that.” She added, “Females act differently when they are around other females and we really need to learn how to get along better. I wish the bullying would stop because it is getting really bad especially with girls. We need to just try and get along no matter what we wear, what color we are, or whether a boy likes this girl or that one – we are all the same basically.”
The information CC and Gracie presented about girls was consistent with current literature on female relationships. Although research does show that most females enjoy hanging out with other females simply because of their similarities and boys tend to become unnerved when girls show a display of emotions, still, the number of girls who voiced the desire to have male friends as opposed to female friends is on the rise. Suggested reasons for this phenomenon are being friends with other females is sometimes too difficult and that members of the opposite sex require less effort to have as friends. Boys usually are less dramatic, less emotional, and engage in less bullying type behaviors such as gossiping, and exclusionary practices for the way someone looks or dresses (DiMarco, 2005).

This is an area where future research is required to better understand the intricacies of relationships between members of the same sex – especially since females are beginning to display behaviors normally thought to be “male only” and are becoming an increasing number in our juvenile justice system, making up one fourth of the arrests among young people. Female juvenile offenders rarely complete high school or obtain a general equivalency diploma (GED) (Chesney-Lind, 2001). In addition, research also states that females need other females in order to learn the art of camaraderie by supporting one another, sharing each other’s secrets and simply enjoying common activities and interests. Some specialists even believe females outlive males because of the friendships they create with each other and maintain throughout their lives (Girl Bullies, 2005).
Academic Discomfort

Although all participants overall were on track for graduation, they voiced similar opinions that within certain classes (mostly large group settings) they had trouble with either the curriculum and/or verbal participation. **Gracie** responded to interview questions about her regular education classes by saying, “I won’t even read aloud in those classes,” and although she thinks the work in her special education classes is sometimes too easy, she finds the work in her team taught classes to be challenging and hard to complete at times.

**Brandy** responded similarly by saying she hardly ever would answer questions out loud in her electives for fear of “looking stupid,” and never volunteered to read aloud but did not feel the same pressure in her academic classes in a small group setting since, as she put it, “They probably don’t know the answer either.” She also said, “I think teachers expect you to learn the first time in both types of classes but the special ed. teachers – they know that you can’t handle as much and they try to go slow, but the other ones go at a face pace.” **CC** replied much in the same manner saying she never willingly answered any questions in the large group setting. She said she did her work and if she needed help, she would ask a classmate, or teacher if necessary.

**Kelly** was the only participant who said she felt comfortable in the regular classroom setting where she had an elective – computer applications. She attributed this feeling of easiness to the rapport she had built with the teacher and the simplicity of the course. She did express discomfort in classes where her academic performance was significantly below grade level such as her algebra class. She stated, “In math class, “I
hardly ever volunteer to work problems on the board and I get real nervous when the
teacher calls on me.”

Scrutiny of Special Education

An additional theme that began to present itself in the analysis of data was
students’ views on special education. Neither Gracie or CC vocalized any scrutiny of
special education practices or classes although they did make comments about classmates
“being slow” or being called retarded” by family members. Nor did either girl describe
much negativity associated with being in the program. All Gracie alluded to was that she
felt like it was time to “step up”, take on the demands of regular education, and CC spoke
of her classes she had in the ninth grade which were mostly team taught classes. When
the researcher inquired why she moved to classes in a small group setting she simply
said, “I think they are better for me.”

Brandy and Kelly were both seniors and naturally had more high school
experience – both taking the graduation test twice already and experiencing failure on
some portions. Kelly opted for a special education diploma already while Brandy
planned to take the graduation test again to see if she could pass the sections she had
failed earlier. The preceding information could be the reason the older girls had more
of a negative view of their schooling process. Kelly had a strong desire to go to college
but realized her options were limited when she did not pass all parts of the graduation
test. Although that dream was not attainable, she reevaluated her goals and came up with
a new plan to receive a special education diploma and then upgrade to a GED and go to
technical school. As she talked, the interviewer gathered that Kelly thought the schooling
process had let her down and not quite done its job leaving her feeling “left behind.”
**Brandy** articulated her feelings very clearly about the role of special education and the possible direction it should take. During her first interview, the researcher asked her, “Where do you think you learn best?” She replied, “I don’t think we learn that much in special ed.” I think we should do the same work they do in regular ed., the same books and everything but just go slower.” She continued by saying, “It’s important because I may need to be in a small group setting because of my reading disability but I need to know what kind of words are going to be on the graduation test.” In her last interview session, the researcher asked **Brandy** how she felt about current research findings that suggest females with disabilities experience less job opportunities, greater rates of depression, increased teenaged pregnancies, and lower self-esteem. She responded with great emotion when she said, “I know that I get very depressed too being in special ed and I really don’t like people putting a label on me. I used to get very depressed about it because my Mom told me not to tell anyone else in our family. So no one in our family knows but my Mom, my step-dad and my sisters. I really don’t like putting a label on it because it is like I can’t do anything. People always have to put special ed. down or something. That is why I am trying to get a regular ed. diploma so I don’t have a special ed. diploma and won’t have to say anything about it to anybody because it is kind of dumb to put a different label, why can’t you just put regular ed. diploma? I mean if they prove themselves, that don’t make any sense. But I think a lot of teens do get pregnant and drop out of school because they think they can’t do it because they are in special ed. I think they can do it; they just have to put their minds to it and quit worrying about what people think. I think that is my problem too, everybody in school thinks that someone is
going to get mad at me or they won’t talk to me anymore, they think I’m slow or something. I think they should just stop worrying about what other people think.”

**Brandy** also made several remarks concerning academic and behavioral levels of her male classmates. She commented repeatedly about their lack of knowledge, the small degree with which they could be of assistance, and their inappropriate behavior. Throughout the interview sessions, she made statements such as these, “If you ask the boys they probably don’t know how to do it, some boys are not that smart but some boys are smart. If you need help in there they can’t help you because they don’t know it. Teachers just expect guys to act stupid because they always see that.”

**Unawareness of Minority Placement/Resistance to Change**

Another common topic that surfaced during the interviews was the females’ unawareness of their distinctive situation. Three out of four participants were very naive to the fact that they were in a minority placement. It was obvious to the researcher that they had not given it much thought and most likely just considered it the norm since they had been in modified self-contained classes for an average of five years. Elementary school teachers referred three participants for evaluation in the fourth and fifth grades while middle school personnel identified and placed the fourth participant in special education during her sixth grade year.

**Brandy**, the oldest of the participants, was the only one who said she did realize her minority status by being one of the few and sometimes the only female in several of her classes since elementary school. When asked, “How do you feel about that type of situation?” she responded, “It is very awkward.” She went on to say, “I always wondered about it because if you are in one class by yourself, just one girl you have no one to relate
to so you wish you had more girls to ask them for help or something.” Brandy added, “I’m the only Hispanic too.” When asked how that made her feel, she used the word “awkward again saying, “…if I had another Hispanic person in there it would be kind of better because we could relate – it don’t matter if it was another Hispanic really but just another girl.”

Despite the fact that most all the participants conveyed in one or more interview session that they wished they had more girls in the classroom with them or that being with mostly boys all day made them feel “uncomfortable, “awkward,” “lonely,” and “bored,” three our of four participants expressed a verbal reluctance to change. Kelly contends that she would like to have more girls in her classes so she could “worry less,” focus more on her lessons,” and “not miss out on the girl stuff” as much but the other females said just the opposite. They all thought that by having more girls in the majority of their classes would only deter them from completing their assignments, attending more classes, and staying out of trouble. The main problem with this viewpoint is that research dictates while in the company of mostly boys, girls usually tend to voice their opinions and take educational risks less often succumbing to peer pressure and social acceptance versus academic achievement (Lichtenstein, 1996).

Personally, the researcher feels as though these young women have been in this unique situation for so long they feel it is part of the norm and that is why they are so reluctant to change. As Greene (1988) stated in The Dialectic of Freedom, “If one does not understand the obstacle or recognize it as impediment… then genuine freedom is not possible” (p. 5). This is just another reason why bringing this issue to the forefront
is so imperative. Past and current practices that continue to assist in perpetuating the status quo need reevaluating and revamped. By starting a dialogue on the subject, these young women may be able to begin their liberation. Freire (1970), In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* spoke of reducing domination through dialogue and love. He stated, “No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical” (p. 142). Anyone who cares about the education and equality of young people must work toward this fundamental goal.

**Self-Esteem**

Throughout each interview session, the researcher analyzed participants’ answers, their demeanor while responding, and the consistency with which they shared information. It is the researcher’s belief that each girl candidly and willingly answered the inquiries made of her. With the conclusion of all interviews, one subject struck the researcher more than any other issue did and that was the determination and self-esteem of each individual. Research dictates that the majority of young women have a loss of self-esteem, especially in their teenaged years. Females with disabilities are in double jeopardy for low self-worth, loss of voice, higher rates of depression, rejection, failure, humiliation, and a diminished sense of pride resulting in lower self-esteem when compared to peers without disabilities (Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001; Orenstein, 1994).

Although this information is overwhelming, these four young women reported experiences that were much more optimistic than found in the research literature. Each individual showed signs of healthy self-esteem, voiced realistic aspirations to pursue,
and goals determined to achieve. They all could name several people who influenced or helped motivate them resulting in a strong support system and despite problematic circumstances were essentially on track for accomplishing their dreams. This factor can be interpreted as the single most important aspect of this study when it comes to sharing their stories especially with girls in the same set of circumstances. It is imperative that other females know how to deal with adversity, maintain high standards, stay on track for graduation, and determine how best to meet their goals. With this information, numerous other females with disabilities may not be at such a disadvantage and could begin to view their future with hope rather than disparity.

Observations

Research Question 1

“Observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for the study” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999 p. 107).

The first research goal addressed the participants’ perceptions of their academic success. Overall, each observation showed all participants on task, working quietly, and asking for help from the teacher or teacher assistant when required. Only one female for one observational period was off task for any real length of time but eventually complied with the teacher’s requests and began her assignment. In several of her classes, each girl had an opportunity to answer questions. Although each one declined to answer in their large group setting, they all appeared attentive to the teacher and the lesson at hand. In their special education classes, the girls participated answering at least one question aloud, with Brandy and Kelly answering several questions each.
Research Question 2

The second research goal addressed the development of participants’ socialization skills. In both settings, the researcher found that in both special and general education classes, little interaction transpired between the girls and their classmates. The interactions that did materialize during the observations seemed negative in nature but since the researcher had spent so much time with each individual through the interview sessions, she felt as if assertiveness for survival rather than inappropriateness described the incidents. For example, during one observation one male student called Gracie the name “two dollar hoe” in her team-taught biology class. She automatically turned to him and told him to “Shut the fuck up.” Granted most teachers and administrators construe this type of behavior as unsuitable – especially for the school setting but neither teacher in the room reprimanded either student. They instead worked to get them back on task, which happened relatively easily after the colorful exchange of words. CC’s negative interaction observed was with one of her teachers as he repeatedly tried to get her on task. She made several rude comments to him but he ignored them and she eventually began working.

In another instance, Kelly was sitting at the front of the room working on an assignment. She spoke to a female sitting next to her and then continued working. A male student said something to her I could not hear and she told him to, “Shut –up!” He continued talking at a low tone and she then said, “I’ll hit you in the face,” He then threatened to hit her and she said, “Well get up and do something then.” The teacher intervened, sent the boy next door, and told Kelly to calm down or she would have to write her up. She initially responded by saying, “I don’t care!” but after a few seconds,
she became quiet and went back to work. The boy did not return during the observational period. All other interactions between participants and other students plus participants and teachers or teaching assistants appeared positive although it was minimal.

**Research Question 3**

The third research goal addressed emerging themes relevant for future research that presented themselves through observations in small and/or large group settings. The main theme that surfaced during the observations was the limited interaction in the large group setting. This gave credence to information of academic discomfort revealed during the interviews in the general education setting. All participants had verbalized their personal insecurities about answering questions or reading aloud in their electives and/or team-taught classes.

Another theme that seemed obvious during the observations was the limited amount of interaction between participants and other students. Each participant had alluded to the fact in the interview sessions that they often liked “working alone” or “independently” and seldom volunteered to work in groups except when necessary or required such as in biology labs. Confirmation of these statements proved true throughout most all the observations. **Kelly** commented about how she liked working by herself on a regular basis but during one class period for a brief period, the researcher observed her interacting positively with another student (male) while working on an assignment. **Brandy** also positively interacted regularly with one male student sitting beside her in her economics class throughout the session. Perhaps students liked interacting more than they articulated but reserved communication for those with whom they felt comfortable.
An additional theme that presented itself was how certain participants felt about being in special education classes. **Brandy** was the main one who made it apparent of her embarrassment being in small classes by hiding behind objects in the classroom and sitting near the wall in other small group classes where no one passing by could see her. She even got up and moved when someone knocked on the door of her history class during one observation asking, “Who is that?” She seemed relieved by sighing when another special education student entered the room. She expressed the same sentiments during her interview where she explained only her immediate family members knew she attended classes for her learning disability and how she desperately wanted a regular education diploma so people would not think, “she was slow” or look down on her.

The last theme that emerged during the observations was one of adaptability. Every participant appeared to be at ease within their set of circumstance even though **Brandy** did show signs of embarrassment and some discomfort by her placement in special education classes. She, along with the other female participants, seemed to have adjusted quite well considering their unique situation in a male dominated classroom most of the school day. These young women portrayed a strength I am not sure I could muster if this situation presented itself to me. Not only was **Brandy** one of or the only female in the majority of her classes, she was also the only Hispanic in all of her academic classes as well. **Kelly** remained one of the few females in all of her academic classes along with being the only White person. **Gracie** experienced the same situation as **Kelly** did since she is also White but in all three of her small group classes, she was the only female in the room whereas **Kelly** had one other female in several classes with her except in physical science where she was the only female. **CC’s** position was unique in
that she was the only Black female who participated in the study. In one class she had one other Black female classmate, in another class there was one other White female, but she was the only female in the remaining three small group classes.

Similar to research findings, Gracie, Kelly, Brandy, and CC all from low-income families and of varying descents, felt as if they had to fend for themselves, be stronger than other females, and often paid a price for voicing their opinion if not through discipline referrals, through others’ attitudes toward their them, and their assertiveness when dealing with uncomfortable or disturbing situations that could often be construed as inappropriate or unacceptable behavior (Taylor, et al., 1995). Overall, through interviews and observation, the researcher thought these four young women were inspirational and could serve as motivation to anyone willing to take time to listen to their enriching stories of adversity and adaptability.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

“As girls mature and enter mid-adolescence, their voices become more tentative and conflicted. Their responses reveal a sometimes debilitating tension between caring for themselves and caring for others, between their understanding of the world and their awareness that is not appropriate to speak or act on this understanding (AAUW, 1992, p. 12).

Feminist scholar, Carolyn Heilbrun, tells us of how women live our lives – through stories. From the time we are little girls, we hear tales of the roles females typically play from damsels in distress in need of rescuing to caring nurturing creatures in training for our roles as loving mothers and wives. Too many stories teach us how to be “Little Women” but all the while are really teaching us what Jo felt in Louisa May Alcott’s classic story – in order to become a woman she had to tame her independence and transform her high spirit into one that was more pleasing but “all the while cursing her fate of being born female” (p. 277). Jackie DeFazio, the former president of the AAUW, adamantly stated that girls today need and deserve more. She contended that actual change can only take place when females become full contributors in the educational, economic, and social life of this country by becoming all they can imagine (Orenstein, 1994). The price teenaged girls pay for their passage into adulthood is rather costly. Deprived of their history, given the strong impression that the maturity of their bodies is more important than the maturity of their minds, recognizing they are not societies’ chosen ones, thereby doubting their intellect and value, females travel into womanhood on a very bumpy road (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

The data collected for this research study offered several insights into the perceptions of females with disabilities and possible ways in which to aid in the provision
of a more equitable education for these individuals plus numerous others in their same set of circumstances. These insights became apparent through the examination of responses given during multiple interview sessions and by way of formal observations in the classroom setting. During the analysis of participants’ responses and observations along with a review of the current literature, several conclusions were drawn connected to the emerging themes. The conclusions that became evident were a need for an increase in programs designed for females and their unique issues, females’ need for caring mentors, a closer look at scheduling practices for students with disabilities, suggestions for improvement within the special education setting, and a need for additional research on females with disabilities to help close the gap in the current research base.

**An Increase in Programs Designed for Females**

Based on previous research and the research findings in this study, it is obvious that one of the main conclusions is a necessity for an increase in the number of programs designed specifically to address problems females experience on a regular basis. **Brandy, Kelly, CC, and Gracie** all articulated the need for additional programs for females. Only two out of four of them could list any type of program at their school designed just for females and one was no longer in existence. Several issues listed that needed addressing ranged from very personal in nature to every day kind of situations. They felt girls needed attention in the manner in which they dress, their attitude toward each other and authority figures, the daily pressures of school, managing a job while maintaining their grades, and relationships with boys, including harassment, abuse and pregnancy.

Effective programs must enforce the fact that females have not only the right but also the obligation to find the courage to be who they are and protect themselves when
necessary. They need to know that it is all right to set boundaries, make mistakes, put their needs in front of others, and express their convictions in a supportive arena (Kuniholm, 2003). In addition, programs and program managers need to be sensitive to the type of information that may be shared when females feel safe enough to disclose highly personal information. Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) found when they interviewed 26 girls in 8th, 9th, and 10th grades what they wanted most was to be heard. They shared endless stories ranging from personal relationships to cultural differences. Teicher (1996) found that by being an active listener in a girl’s life could make all the difference and help her move more toward inclusion rather than isolation thereby avoiding an array of societal pitfalls.

Programs to address sexual harassment in the schools must be a priority of educators not only for females with disabilities but also for all students including the male population since this problem is a microcosm of the entire school system in special and regular education. These problems are then often times transcended into society as a whole.

Occupation preparedness is an additional area where increased programming is vitally needed. Research reports that females with disabilities are at further disadvantages for unemployment, lower wages, and career advancement. Statistics show that two thirds of the adult population living in poverty is female. Women make up over half the work force but make a smaller percentage of the wages, and usually work in service occupations that generally offer substandard income and less chance for advancement. Females with disabilities are faring no better and are often searching for employment without the needed preparation, skills, or post secondary education made
available to their male counterparts or females without disabilities (Lichtenstein, 1996 & Fulton, 1994).

Females’ Need for Caring Mentors

Effective programs are of vital importance for females with disabilities but individual mentors can be of even more significance given that so many young women are often intimidated to speak in groups and prefer to confide in someone privately. By teaching special education at the middle school level for nine years and a high school teacher at the location where this study took place for the past eleven years, I am fully aware of pre adolescent and adolescent females’ need to have positive mentors in their life. However, it seems as though females with disabilities require extra attention since exclusive situations take place on a frequent basis. I have personally observed Brandy, Kelly, CC, and Gracie all seeking assistance from several individuals for a variety of dilemmas. In the interview sessions, none of them stated they were comfortable going to the counselors for any type of support but they were able to name several other individuals they sought for help with problems of an academic or social nature. Some of the girls mentioned friends in whom they confided where most of them named teachers and other adults in the building with whom they had built a trusting relationship. Nevertheless, all participants recognized the need for mentors and some even mentioned becoming mentors for younger females.

The research discusses many losses females suffer but it also suggests ways to overcome these losses. One way in particular is through mentoring – giving support to females when they are struggling with obstacles facing them while they are trying to find out who they are and who they may become. Research also shows that girls who have an
active mentor in their life experience less turmoil and make better decisions. Caring mentors can give females a sanction in which to feel comfortable enough to share pertinent information without the fear of harsh judgment or criticism. Mentors have the obligation to encourage young women to make their education and health a priority (Kuniholm, 2003). Perhaps that is why overall Brandy, Kelly, CC, and Gracie all seemed well adjusted and displayed a positive self-esteem despite overwhelming barriers to their success – the presence of active mentors in their life.

A Closer Look at Scheduling Practices

Three out of four of the participants admitted to not wanting more females in class with them for various reasons, disputing what current research states about choice of companions. However, the researcher felt as though they were unaware of relationships that could be missing from their lives since they had been in this limited set of circumstances for several years. Their unawareness then could be responsible for perpetuating their lack of desire to make a change in their current situation. Gracie and CC even articulated specific reasons why they did not want other females in class with them but once again, they both seemed very accepting of boys’ behavior and ignoring their needs and/or rights in the process.

Other research states that numerous females feel uncomfortable in the presence of males under many conditions and this uneasiness could perhaps increase when they are placed in an extreme minority situation – being one of or the only female in the group. Too often, when girls get into heated debates or have a strong difference of opinion, it is quickly referred to as a “Cat Fight” hence calling attention to their behavior and thinking it is unacceptable, they end their discussion – just one method used to silence females (A
Girl’s Perspective on All-Girls Classrooms, 2005). Additional research supports the notion that by early childhood, children clearly choose to play with members of the same sex when given a choice. Possible causes for this choice is unclear but some reasons suggested are the difference in interaction styles and that girls tend to have less physical control over boys, and boys were less likely to listen to girls when they shared their ideas. The research also proposes that by the age of five, girls refrain from expressing their thoughts, emotions, and generally act differently in the company of boys (Maccoby, 1990 & Maccoby, 1988).

Another reason for scheduling practices to be re-examined to better meet the needs of all learners is the fact that not only do girls tend to feel inhibited around just boys, but that boys are inclined to behave in a manner that could often construed as reckless, dangerous, and even immoral when they are in the majority. One man’s account of his teenaged years was disturbing as he described activities in which he participated with his male friends as ludicrous. He explained their behavior as a “pack mentality,” saying what guys will do when they are in a group of other guys can be somewhat frightening. He stated that boys try to impress one another, out do each other, and lose all inhibitions in an effort to gain approval and/or the respect of the other members of the group even if it means disregard for other’s feelings or dignity (Growing up in the 50’s, 2005). Boys also need the practice on how to appropriately interact with females but that is hard to accomplish when there are hardly ever any girls in several of their academic classes. These reasons alone are enough to cause a school or school system to take a closer look at scheduling practices for special education students. The middle school that feeds into the high school where this study took place began looking at scheduling
practices last school term and revamped their system of scheduling basically one female per class. It is my hope and intention that the high school will follow suit and strongly consider alternative options for the 2006-2007 school year.

Suggestions for Improvement within the Special Education Setting

The next conclusion that the researcher drew from the analysis of the data was not one of continuity among participants nor was it supported in the literature review but one participant spoke so adamantly on the subject that I felt it necessary to include. Brandy recognized that she had a reading disability, was uncomfortable reading in her large group classes, and probably learned best in the small group setting since she did not feel nearly as inhibited in those types of surroundings. However, she strongly expressed the desire for special education to improve on its procedures to enhance student achievement.

There is so much debate on the effectiveness of special education; I chose to stick with the two major issues Brandy expressed during her interviews. Her first criticism was of the curriculum. Having taken the graduation test and failing a couple of sections, Brandy was adamant about material taught in special education. She strongly stated that students in a small group setting needed exposure to the same information but she did acknowledge that special education teachers might have to go slower when introducing material and reteach more often than the regular education teacher does thereby covering less subject matter.

Brandy’s second criticism of special education was the use of textbooks in the classroom. She did not understand why there had to be two sets of books for the same course just because the classes were in two different settings. Once again, she felt as
though students with disabilities should have access to the same information including the same textbooks as general education students. Many educators feel the same way and in order to meet Georgia Professional Standards, special education no longer can order books that do not meet these standards as of the 2006-2007 school year, hence they must adopt the same books regular education does from this point forward.

These criticisms need to be addressed by educators especially when it comes to the writing and implementation of a child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These documents must include all aspects for a quality education for students with disabilities. Educators, parents, and students must also advocate all requirements needed for success when planning for an appropriate education for all students.

A Need for Additional Research on Females with Disabilities

The most overwhelming conclusion drawn from this study was the need for additional research on females with disabilities. While much information was gathered from Brandy, Kelly, CC, and Gracie, they are only four representatives and there is a wealth of data from numerous other females that needs examining in order to provide a more equitable education and hope for a greater quality of life for these young women. The research on females with disabilities is extremely bare in the professional literature, which in itself, speaks volumes. It is noted that they require extra attention, tend to experience greater alienation, higher rates of depression, more experiences of failure, and a lack of self-confidence that is needed to make important life decisions (Orenstein, 1994). The research available suggests that having a disability and being female often manifests itself through a higher rate of unemployment, widespread poverty, and frequent
premature pregnancies putting them further at risk. In addition females with disabilities living in poverty have a greater chance of having a child or children with disabilities, thereby perpetuating the status quo (Fujiura & Yamaki, 2000).

Additional studies have constantly exposed disparities in weekly earnings, hours worked, kinds of positions held, and chances for advancement for females with disabilities when compared to their male counterparts. As long as these practices remain in place and appear acceptable, females will continue to face injustice, indifference, and ultimately financial insecurity that will place them and their children on a never-ending cycle of poverty (Wagner, 1992).

Other research has focused on similarities rather than gender differences among students with disabilities but there is relatively little known about the experiences of what it means to be female or male with a disability (Fine & Asch, 1988). Much of the research is “gender blind” focusing on the disability rather than who has the disability. By ignoring the sex of the individual, the disability becomes the prevailing factor that further alienates females since they are the group most marginalized and educators, politicians, and researchers have typically ignored this group of schoolchildren (Fine & Asch, 1981). Gender is even seen as a “non issue” by many professionals (Vardill, 2000) and a hindrance by others. Shields (1992) examined The AAUW’s account of how females are shortchanged. He stated that the overall achievement level of the American student is lacking and talk of gender simply distracts discussions on a much-needed plan of action for improving all learners’ success.

While achievement is highly desirable, females continue to struggle with
gaining equality in today’s schools. Other authors recommend that everyone who cares anything about girls in any respect must view themselves as advocates and fight for their educational equality – no matter their station in life. They add that we must encourage school systems to give females the attention they warrant in order to close a gap of prejudice in our learning institutions across America (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Further research contends that if we plan on making a difference in the lives of females it is the system that needs to change. By listening to the voices of these young women and appreciating the stories they have to tell, it could very well be the catalyst needed to boost the system’s awareness of its shortcomings and begin to provide more equitable opportunities for young women (Taylor et. al., 1995).

Although the research base is full of several trends in special education there continues to be a lack of research concerning the effects of being the only or one of the few females in a male-dominated classroom most of the school day without the presence of a same sex support group. Then to add females of color, lesbian and bisexual females, girls from low-income families, and immigrant females as an additional factor(s), studies are virtually nonexistent (Iglesias & Corimer, 2002). Brandy, Kelly, CC, and Gracie gave so freely of themselves when asked multiple personal questions that invaded some very intimate spaces in their lives. By hearing their stories, the researcher appreciates many directions future research should go. The goal of this study remains to assist in placing the attention of educators, politicians, school boards, and lay citizens on this population of students by narrowing the substantial gap in special education literature on females with disabilities and begin to “fulfill the promise of a quality education for all students” (Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001, p. 2).
REFERENCES


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Nadeau, K. (2002). Is your daughter a daydreamer, tomboy, or “Chatty Kathy?”


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

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Institutional Review Board (IRB)  

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<th>Phone: 912-486-7758</th>
<th>Administrative Annex</th>
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<td>Fax: 912-681-0719</td>
<td>P.O. Box 8005</td>
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| Oversight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu | Statesboro, GA 30460 |

To: Nancy Mitchell  
4093 Water Hole Court  
Douglasville, GA 30153

cc: Grigory Dimitriev, Faculty Advisor  
P. O. Box 8144

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IRB/IBC)  

Date: May 12, 2005

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: "H05149," and titled: "What Happens to Girls When They are the Only Female in a Male Dominated Setting?", it appears that there are some conditions that must be met before final approval can be granted. Please address these conditions and send them into the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at P.O. Box 8005. You may not proceed with your research until you receive a final approval from the IRB.

Please address the following conditions individually and highlight any changes made:

1. The language level of the Parental Consent and Minor Assent forms need to be brought down to a level that is comprehensible to the participant and parents. The Parental Consent should be written at about an 8th grade reading level.
2. The Informed Consent and Minor Assent forms must state that parents are allowed to see their child’s answers, if they will be allowed to see them.
3. Please explain how transportation will be handled since the interviews will take place after regular school hours.
4. Where will the interviews take place?
5. Is the Researcher in a position over the participants? Are they the Researcher’s students?

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about these conditions of approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 486-7758. Please send a copy of your revised application and additional documents to the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs (PO Box 8005). Please do not send only revised sections of your proposal, but the entire application with all necessary revisions needs to be sent to the above address, within 60 days of the date of this letter.

Please note: The undersigned is on behalf of the Institutional Review Board. Due to the process in place for reviewing applications, comments regarding proposals are that of multiple IRB members. For questions regarding conditions set on your proposal, please contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 486-7758.

Sincerely,

Julie B. Cole  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

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APPENDIX B

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<td><a href="mailto:oversight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu">oversight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu</a></td>
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To: Nancy Mitchell  
4093 Water Hole Court  
Douglasville, GA 30135

cc: Grigory Dmitriyev, Faculty Advisor  
P. O. Box 8144

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: June 15, 2005

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: H05149, and titled “What Happens to Girls When They are the Only Female in a Male Dominated Setting?”, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a Research Study Termination form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Julie B. Cole  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Dear Principal,

I am Nancy Mitchell, a student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a study on high school girls with disabilities. I am sure you are aware that the number of females placed in special education is much lower than the male population resulting in there being only one or two girls per class. My study’s main purpose is to determine the academic and social effects this has on females placed in such a minority.

The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to interview four females at your school who have been identified with either a learning disability and/or emotional/behavior disorder. Each interview will take about 30 - 45 minutes each. I will ask them a set of questions on their experiences and feelings about being one of the few girls in some or all of their classes. These interviews will take place at Creekside High School in a private classroom during the summer or the fall of the 2005-2006 school year.

None of the teachers or anyone else at the school will see the answers to the questions that I ask the participants. Only the project supervisor, Dr. Grigory Dmitriyev, and I will know the names of the participants. Pseudonyms will be used to stand for the participants’ names in place of their real names for confidentiality purposes. All audiotapes and notes from the interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet until the project is complete. They will then be destroyed.

The risks from this study are no more than would take place in everyday life and are considered minimal.

The following benefits could come from this study:

a. This study could help girls with disabilities develop a voice that has traditionally been silenced or overlooked.

b. This study could help girls with disabilities take a more active role in school, become less dependent, and prepare them better for life after high school.

c. This study could help teachers on how to offer a better education for high school girls with disabilities.

d. You or any of the participants, or their parents (if they are under age eighteen) may request a copy of this study once it is complete.
Please sign below if you grant permission for me to interview four females with disabilities at your school. Parental consent forms for each participant will be completed prior to interviewing.

Principal Signature ___________________________________     Date ______________

If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, please call me at 770-306-4300 or contact the IRB coordinator of the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-5465.

Please allow me to thank you in advance for your assistance in studying this issue. The results should allow me to better understand the needs of females with disabilities and in essence all students.

Respectfully,

Nancy C. Mitchell
Curriculum Studies Doctoral Student
Georgia Southern University

________ I wish to obtain a copy of the report summary.
Hello,

I am Nancy Mitchell, a graduate student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting a study on high school girls in special education.

You are being asked to lend a hand in a project that will help me learn about the effects on girls with disabilities being in classrooms most of the school day with all males. If you agree to help, you will be asked to participate in a two - four interviews where I will ask you some questions about your experiences and feelings about being one of the few or only girl in certain classes. These interviews will take about 30 - 45 minutes each. They will take place at Creekside High School in a private classroom during the summer or this fall.

You do not have to help me with this project. You can stop whenever you want to. You can say no to any of the questions, just let me know and that will take care of that. You can refuse to help me even if your parents have said yes.

None of the teachers or other people at our school will see the responses to the questions that I ask you. Only you and your parents may review what you have said. All of the answers that you give me will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a room at Georgia Southern University. Only my advisor and I will see your answers. We are not going to put your name on the answers that you give us, so no one will be able to know which answers are yours.

If you or your parents/guardians have any questions about this form or the project, please call me at 404 644-6855 or my advisor, Dr. Dmitriyev, at 912 681-5091. Thank you!

If you understand the information above and want to help in the project, please sign your name on the line below:

Yes, I want to help in the project: ________________________________

Child’s Name (Please print): ________________________________

Investigator’s Signature : ________________________________

Date : ________________________________
Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am Nancy Mitchell, a student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a study on girls with disabilities at the High School Level.

Your child is being asked to lend a hand that will help me learn about the effects on high school aged girls with disabilities who are in classes most of the school day with all boys. If you agree to let your child help me, she will be asked to take part in two - four interviews. Each interview will take about 30 – 45 minutes. I will ask her some questions on her experiences and feelings of being one of the few girls in class. These interviews will take place at Creekside High School in a private classroom during the school day or this summer. If any interviews are carried out after school, transportation will need to be provided by the parent. Please think about this before giving your child permission to take part in the study.

Your child does not have to help me with this project. She is not currently a student of mine and, therefore, I have no power over her at all. If you agree, your child may still stop at any time she wishes. She may also refuse to answer any of the questions asked.

You are assured that all subject matter is private. Only the project supervisor, Dr. Grigory Dmitriyev, and I will know the names of the participants. No information that will identify your child will be shared. Pseudonyms will be used to stand for all study participants rather than actual names. All audiotapes and notes from the interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet until the project is complete. They will then be destroyed when the study is complete. Your child has the right to review any answers given before the responses are destroyed.

The risks from helping with this study are no more than would be met in everyday life. However, you are advised that some questions may cause a small amount of discomfort as the study asks participants to talk about subject matter that may be slightly uncomfortable.

The following benefits could come from your child helping with this project:

   e. This study could help girls with disabilities develop a voice that has traditionally been silenced or overlooked.
   f. This study could help high school girls with disabilities take a more active role in school, become more independent, and prepare them better for life after high school.
   g. This study could help teachers on how to offer a better education for high school girls with disabilities.
You and your child have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher or her faculty advisor. Their names, phone numbers, and addresses are located at the end of this form. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: What Happens to Girls When They are the Only Female in a Male Dominated Setting?

Principal Investigator: Nancy Mitchell, Address: 4093 Water Hole Court, Douglasville, GA 30135, Phone Number: 404 644-6855, Email Address: mitchelln@fulton.k12.ga.us

Other Investigator(s): none

Faculty Advisor: Name of Advisor: Gregory Dmitriyev, Address of Advisor: PO Box 8144, Statesboro, GA 30460-8144, Phone number: 912 681-5091, Email address: gregodmi@georgiasouthern.edu

Researcher’s Signature: ________________________________________________________________

Child’s Name: ________________________________________________________________

Parent or Guardian’s Signature: ______________________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________________________________
Dear Participant:

I am Nancy Mitchell, a student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a study on high school girls in special education.

You have been asked to lend a hand in a project that will help me learn more about the effects on girls with disabilities who are in classes nearly all day with just boys. If you agree to assist me with this project, you will be asked to take part in two – four interviews. Each interview will take about 30 - 45 minutes each. I will ask you a set of questions on your experiences and feelings about being one of the few girls in some or all of your classes. These interviews will take place at Creekside High School in a private classroom during the summer or after school in the fall. Transportation will need to be provided by you or your parents to and from school. Please think about this before agreeing to help with this research.

You do not have to help me with this project. If you want to help me, please keep in mind that you are not a student of mine, so I have no power over you at all. If you agree to help, you may still stop at any time. You may also refuse to answer any questions asked.

None of your teachers or anyone else at our school will see the answers to the questions that I ask you. Only the project supervisor, Dr. Grigory Dmitriyev, and I will know the names of the participants. Numbers will be used to stand for all participants rather than names. All audiotapes and notes from the interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet until the project is complete. They will then be destroyed. You have the right to listen to your oral responses and look at all comments made before the tapes and notes are destroyed.

The risks from taking part in this study are no more than would take place in everyday life. However, you are advised that some questions may cause a small amount of discomfort as the study asks participants to talk about subject matter that may be slightly uncomfortable.

The following benefits could come from you helping with this study:

h. This study could help girls with disabilities develop a voice that has traditionally been silenced or overlooked.

i. This study could help girls with disabilities take a more active role in school, become less dependent, and prepare them better for life after high school.

j. This study could help teachers on how to offer a better education for high school girls with disabilities.

You have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have any questions about this study, please let the researcher or the researcher’s faculty advisor know, whose names, phone numbers, and addresses are located at the end of this form. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.
You must be 18 years of age or older to agree to participate in this study. If you wish to help with this project and to the terms above, please sign your name and put the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

**Title of Project:** What Happens to Girls When they are the Only Female in a Male Dominated Setting?

**Principal Investigator:** Name: Nancy Mitchell, Address of Principal Investigator: 4093 Water Hole Court Douglasville, GA 30135, Phone number: 404 644-6855, and email address: mitchelln@fulton.k12.ga.us.

Other Investigator(s): N/A

**Faculty Advisor:** Name of Advisor: Grigory Dmitriyev, Address of Advisor: Phone number: Email address: gregodmi@georgiasouthern.edu

____________________________________  _____________________  
Participant’s Signature     Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

____________________________________  _____________________  
Investigator’s Signature     Date
APPENDIX G
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. a. What is your name and grade level?
   b. How many years have you received (SEC) special education services?

2. a. How do you think the school identified you for special education services?
   b. When were you first placed?

3. a. Describe your classes you take in a self-contained (small group) setting?
   b. Describe your classes you take in the general education setting?
   c. Which classes do you prefer or like best? Why?
   d. Where do you think you learn best? Why?

4. a. Tell me about your grades in each of your classes?
   b. Who do you go to for academic guidance?

5. a. About how many girls are in each of your classes?
   b. Are more girls in your general education and/or elective classes?
   c. Are any of your friends in your classes?
   d. Tell me about your friends.

6. a. Describe your feelings about being one of the few or only girl in some of your classes.
   b. Did you realize you were in a minority situation?
   c. Describe your feelings including your comfort level about being a girl where boys are, by far, the majority.

7. a. Describe some of your experiences of being one of the few or only female student in any of your classes.
   b. Would you describe these experiences as positive or negative?

8. a. Have you experienced any intimidation in any of your classes? If so, in which classes and from whom?
   b. How did you deal with this behavior?
   c. Have you ever been the one to perform the intimidation? If so, what was the purpose?

9. a. Describe the attention you receive in each of your classes from your peers (girls and boys)?
   b. Describe the attention you receive from your teachers in each of your classes?
   c. Do you think you receive more or less attention in your self-contained classes or your general education classes?
d. Tell me how this make you feel?

10. a. Who gets disciplined more in each your classes?
    b. For what type of infractions?

11. a. Describe your teachers’ behavioral expectations for students in each of your classes.
    b. Do you think expectations differ among students? Among girls and boys?

12. a. Have you ever been suspended?
    b. If so, for what offense(s)?

13. a. Do you feel a need to be more assertive in some classes than others?
    b. If so, which ones? Why?

14. a. Describe your teachers’ academic expectations in all of your classes.
    b. How do they compare with the expectations of the boys in your classes?

15. a. When a teacher asks a question in class how do you feel about answering?
    b. Describe your comfort level when speaking out in each class.

16. a. How would you describe your motivation level toward your academic or self-contained classes? Toward your electives and/or general education classes?
    b. In which classes do you try harder? Why?

17. Tell me about who and/or what has provided the largest influence on your academic performance in school?

18. a. Tell me about your plans after high school?
    b. Are you planning on graduating?
    c. Describe a possible career and/or college you would like to pursue?

19. Describe your attendance.

20. Describe your participation level in extracurricular activities such as clubs, organizations, or sports?

21. Do you feel you have the same opportunities as boys in your school?

22. a. Describe any classes, programs, or organizations that are designed to encourage females to excel at your school.
    b. If you could create any such program and/or organization what would it be?
c. Describe its mission and goals.

23. a. Much of the recent research on females ignores females with disabilities. Do you ever feel ignored?
   b. If so, in what matter, and by whom?

24. a. Research also states that females with disabilities often experience lower self-esteem, depression at greater rates, less job opportunities, and become pregnant at an earlier age than their general education peers. How do you feel about these research findings?

25. We’ve talked a lot about your academic performance, plans after high school along with how you get through your day being with mostly boys including behavioral expectations, suspensions, and attendance in school so I would like to conclude with a couple of questions to recap what we have been discussing.

   a. Tell me if you feel that your academic performance would be better if there were more girls in each of your classes.
   b. Tell me if you think you would attend more classes, get into less trouble, or be more involved with the whole school program if you had more girls in class with you.
   c. Do you think being with males most of the school day hinders you from achieving or behaving the best you can? How?
RESEARCHER: What is your name and grade level?

GRACIE: My name is Gracie and I am in the 9th grade this year.

RESEARCHER: How many years have you received special education services?

GRACIE: This is my fifth year.

RESEARCHER: Ok since elementary school? Were you in special education maybe in the 3rd or 4th grade?

GRACIE: When I was in the 4th I started going to small classes.

RESEARCHER: How do you think the school identified you or who identified you for special education services.

GRACIE: The school did at first, they tried to say I was ADD and they tried to put me on medicine and my Mom would not agree to it. My Mom did agree to not putting me in special education at the time but taking me out for reading. The school recommended it.

RESEARCHER: You said you had been identified with an attention deficit disorder. Do you take medication for it now?

GRACIE: No.

RESEARCHER: Can you describe the classes you take in a small group setting, it could be this year or in elementary or middle school?

GRACIE: Last year I always took small classes but not science. I take reading, which is literature now. I take that in a small setting. Health is team-taught.

RESEARCHER: You said math in small group.
GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: You do not have political science this year.

GRACIE: No.

RESEARCHER: Do you have any other classes?

GRACIE: I have social skills.

RESEARCHER: Is that a small group?

GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: What about the classes you take in general Ed or a large group setting?

GRACIE: One is biology team taught with coach McRae and Mrs. Brown-Jones. I take Health with Mrs. Walker and Coach Donerlson.

RESEARCHER: Which classes do you prefer or do you like best?

GRACIE: I like biology but I really like health. I feel sometimes I need to be in a small group but I need to take the next step and stop being babied in a small group.

RESEARCHER: How are your grades this year?

GRACIE: This year I haven’t gotten my progress report yet but last year I only failed two classes the whole year, I was on the A&B honor roll in special education. I just never had problems with my grades.

RESEARCHER: Did you say that you haven’t received a progress report this year?

GRACIE: Well, I received you know like the beginning that lets you know how you are doing and they were kind of bad.

RESEARCHER: Were they bad in all classes? Were they failing?

GRACIE: Like two of them were.

RESEARCHER: Do you remember which tow you were failing?
GRACIE: One was JROTC and the other one was biology.

RESEARCHER: Now earlier when we were talking about your large group classes you didn’t mention JROTC, is that a large group?

GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Is it a team taught class?

GRACIE: No, just one teacher, Sergeant Vann.

RESEARCHER: Gracie, when you need help who do you go to for academic help or guidance?

GRACIE: My teacher, Mrs. Morgan.

RESEARCHER: Do you ever visit the counselors?

GRACIE: No.

RESEARCHER: Why not?

GRACIE: Because they just say they will help you or they will say how do you feel about that? I just think that they think that they know but they don’t.

RESEARCHER: So you have a better relationship or feel more comfortable with your teachers than with the counselors?

GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Now looking at your classes this year you said you had JROTC, biology and health in a large group and that leaves your other three classes in a small group. How many girls are there in each of your classes?

GRACIE: For math I am the only girl.

RESEARCHER: OK that is a small group, right?
GRACIE: Yes, and in social skills, I am the only girl. For literature, I am the only girl. For biology there are other girls in there because it is a team taught class so there is probably about eight girls and the rest boys. In health class it is team taught so there is other girls in there also.

RESEARCHER: Are any of your friends in your classes? The people you normally hang out with?

GRACIE: No, not really. I really don’t hang out with anybody except for my friend Sophia.

RESEARCHER: Does she go to this school?

GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Could you tell me about your friends?

GRACIE: Sophia, she is real sweet. She makes good grades and stuff. I have another friend named Brandy but since we went to high school we sort of stopped talking. I have more of associates than I do friends.

RESEARCHER: Now you mentioned two particular friends and they were both females. Do you have any friends who are boys?

GRACIE: A lot. I mostly hang out with boys since I am with them all day. I hang out with a lot of boys in my neighborhood and stuff and most of my friends are boys.

RESEARCHER: Gracie if you would please describe your feelings about being the only girl in the three classes you described, your math, social skills and literature class.

GRACIE: It doesn’t really bother me that much because it is real boring, really, really boring because the boys are all talking and there is no one to talk to except for the teachers and I don’t know it is different.
RESEARCHER: How is it different than being in your team-taught classes?

GRACIE: I don’t know like team-taught is like I said I do have associates that I do talk to.

RESEARCHER: Girls or boys?

GRACIE: Both but in the smaller classes they are usually in there for behavior and they usually all act a fool and always get in trouble and it is just like we have more freedom in the small group.

RESEARCHER: Ok, girls do?

GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Did you realize that you were in a minority situation by being the only girl in the class, have you ever thought about that before?

GRACIE: I was what?

RESEARCHER: In a minority situation.

GRACIE: Not really.

RESEARCHER: Do you know what I mean by that?

GRACIE: No.

RESEARCHER: A majority is over 50%. A minority could be anything 49% or lower. So being the only girl with about how many boys are in your class?

GRACIE: Probably about six.

RESEARCHER: So with six boys and one girl that makes you in an extreme minority situation.

GRACIE: I understand.
RESEARCHER: How do you feel about that or what is your comfort level about being the only girl where boys are the majority?

GRACIE: I wouldn’t say that I was uncomfortable because I have gone to school with them since the 6th grade. It is pretty comfortable with them except for some of the newer ones.

RESEARCHER: Do you ever feel alienated from the group or set apart when you are the only girl in there?

GRACIE: In the smaller classes yeah because I think some of them do like to show off because I am the only girl in there and they are always loud and have something to say. I keep to myself most of the time. In team taught like classes and stuff I am usually put in groups, like for labs in Biology but in Health I just like to work by myself because I like working alone at times.

RESEARCHER: Can you think of any experiences of being the only female?

Experiences that either made you feel different or that really stands out in your head?

GRACIE: Some of the boys in the class are rude, they have rude mouths and that really gets on my nerves, but that is any boy in general. Being in a class with a whole bunch of boys for a whole period bothers me.

RESEARCHER: Ok you said that they have rude mouths so can you give me an example of what they might say.

GRACIE: They always say hey do you want to suck my you know, just rude stuff like that.

RESEARCHER: Are the comments usually of a sexual nature?

GRACIE: Yes.
RESEARCHER: Overall, would you say these experiences are positive or negative?

GRACIE: Most of them are positive, like I said it don’t happen all the time it is just once in a blue moon.

RESEARCHER: Well, how do you deal with it when it happens?

GRACIE: I just roll my eyes because they usually go hey girl and I say you know I have a name and it is Gracie and you should respect me better than that. They say you are tripping but I understand and after that they don’t ask me any more.

RESEARCHER: It appears that you are comfortable in handling certain situations and like you said the way they speak to you. When this first started happening do you remember how you handled it?

GRACIE: I went home and told my Mom the first time that it happened and my Mom is well we have an older brother and she is just like a person who says kids are kids and she is not the kind that would go over to the school and press charges. She tells me that I need to say something to them and that is what I did and it did get better.

RESEARCHER: Ok so you just kind of spoke up for yourself. Have you experienced any intimidation in any of your classes?

GRACIE: Not really but if I am in a class with another girl because of all the boys they try to act hard or whatever.

RESEARCHER: The boys do?

GRACIE: Yeah if there is another girl the boys show out and then she may want to show off for them.

RESEARCHER: Well when this happens how do you try and deal with it?

GRACIE: If she is just talking to me I will ignore her.
RESEARCHER: What if she called you a name or something?

GRACIE: I would just tell her that she don’t know me like that.

RESEARCHER: So usually if you have experienced intimidation it is from the other girl in the class right?

GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Have you ever intimidated other people or have you done the bullying.

GRACIE: Once.

RESEARCHER: What about the attention you receive in each of your classes?

GRACIE: I usually get a lot because I am the only girl.

RESEARCHER: Do you get a lot of attention from the boys?

GRACIE: No from the teachers.

RESEARCHER: Is it positive attention?

GRACIE: Yes, they try and include me in things.

RESEARCHER: We had talked earlier and you said in JROTC, health and biology those are team taught or large group settings, right?

GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Do you think you get more attention in those classes or less attention?

GRACIE: Less.

RESEARCHER: You get less, why do you think that is?

GRACIE: I don’t know.

RESEARCHER: Do you think you do better in a smaller group?

GRACIE: Yes I like smaller groups better.
RESEARCHER: In each of your classes who gets disciplined more or who does the teacher write up and get on to more?

GRACIE: The boys.

RESEARCHER: What kind of things do they do?

GRACIE: Just being loud and always talking about different subjects, gangs mostly or street signs and stuff like that.

RESEARCHER: Could you describe your teachers’ behavioral expectation for students in each of your classes? How do they expect you to behave?

GRACIE: Just to come in and if they don’t have something on the board to go ahead and do another task or wait quietly for them to announce it. Just do your work and then if you have a few minutes you can talk.

RESEARCHER: Do you think the teachers show any favoritism maybe with the boys or girls in the class?

GRACIE: I think they are the same.

RESEARCHER: What about you have you ever been suspended?

GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: What for if you don’t mind me asking?

GRACIE: Smoking and fighting.

RESEARCHER: Now is this just this year or in middle school also?

GRACIE: Yes in middle school also. I have been a couple of times to sweep and late for classes. I use to skip classes too but not much any more.

RESEARCHER: In some of your classes do you feel a need to be more assertive than in other classes? You said you had been suspended for fighting, did you feel the need to
stand up for yourself in some classes more than others did? Let me explain what I mean by assertive first. Assertiveness is sticking up for yourself that usually doesn’t get to the point of a fight but sometimes it could lead to one.

GRACIE: I have only been in one fight in the classroom area and that was because of a girl being real smart to me and saying rude things to me. I have been in like six fights in my whole life, some off campus so I really don’t like to fight at school.

RESEARCHER: Why is that?

GRACIE: Because suspension it gets my grades behind and it gets me grounded.

RESEARCHER: But as far as in your classes you do not feel that you need to be more assertive in some than others?

GRACIE: In team taught there are more girls in there and there is more people talking and more people showing out.

RESEARCHER: When you talked about sexual harassment, you said your mother wanted you to handle it yourself, so you have been right?

GRACIE: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Does it continue to happen periodically?

GRACIE: Not that much, just stupid comments. If it had continued to happen I would tell Mom and she would say I guess I will take care of it then. As long as it was just them saying stuff I could handle it but if they would have touched me she would handle it.

RESEARCHER: What I hear you saying is that sometimes they continue to harass you sexually or say things but now you just ignore them.

GRACIE: Yes but if it continued I would say something to the teacher.
RESEARCHER: What about academic expectations, do your teachers expect you to do well in your classes? Do you think your teachers’ academic expectations are the same for the girls as they are for the boys?

GRACIE: Other than the dress codes everything is the same.

RESEARCHER: The dress code?

GRACIE: Yeah, they are stricter on the girls.

RESEARCHER: When a teacher asks a question out loud in class, how do you feel about answering it?

GRACIE: Like first period I have social skills and I don’t know them real good yet so if I want to answer it I will if I don’t then I won’t.

RESEARCHER: Do you think you answer more questions in your small group classes or your large group classes?

GRACIE: I don’t even read out loud in the large group.

RESEARCHER: So you still feel a little intimidated academically in your large group classes?

GRACIE: I always have.

RESEARCHER: I remember you saying something about you feel like you were being babied and you wanted to move on up, that special ed made you feel a little babied, is that right?

GRACIE: Yeah but in a way I like to be babied. I have a hard time with the work sometimes in my large groups.

RESEARCHER: Tell me about your motivational level, how well do you want to make good grades?
GRACIE: I want to make good grades and I am motivated to. I want to graduate, I would be the first person in my family to graduate and I want to go to college to be an animal cop and there is a school for that in Douglasville.

RESEARCHER: That is great. Do you try harder in some classes than you do others, I am just curious?

GRACIE: I try real hard in health and I try hard in biology.

RESEARCHER: It sounds like you try harder in your large group classes, is that right?

GRACIE: Yes. I want to do well in all my classes but I guess I am trying to prove that I can do the work in all my classes.

RESEARCHER: When we left off we were talking about your classes and how motivated you were in each class. Could you tell me if there is something that has happened in your life or someone who has had a large influence on your academic performance at school? I know one thing you said earlier that has provided influence is that you want to be the first one to graduate in your family.

GRACIE: Yes. My Mom dropped out when she was in the 9th grade because she got pregnant with my brother. My Dad dropped out I think in middle school because I think his Mom was real sick and he had to help her. My Papa dropped out and my Grandmother dropped out too.

RESEARCHER: What about your brothers?

GRACIE: My brother Chris just now dropped out. My brother Reed graduated but he is my stepbrother.

RESEARCHER: So that motivates you to do well. Is there a person, someone who encourages you to reach your goal?
GRACIE: My Papa, I wouldn’t really say motivates me but I would say more like pressures me. When I don’t do something right he just gets so mad.

RESEARCHER: Do you want to please him or do you do it just because?

GRACIE: I do but not enough to wear me out.

RESEARCHER: Do you want to make him proud, is that where you are coming from?

GRACIE: I do but enough just isn’t enough for him.

RESEARCHER: So you want to do this mostly for you then?

GRACIE: Yes and my Mother.

RESEARCHER: Oh ok your Mom?

GRACIE: Yeah because my brothers didn’t graduate and my baby sister is just six.

RESEARCHER: Earlier you talked about your plans after high school. Do you mind telling me those again?

GRACIE: I want to graduate and go to college to be either a veterinarian or animal cop. There are some colleges in Douglasville that me and my brother checked out.

RESEARCHER: Working with animals for sure. Do you have animals?

GRACIE: Yes I have two dogs, a cat named Shady and we just got a little kitten and her name is Bell.

RESEARCHER: I have one dog and one cat. I found out recently that my dog likes eating cat food better than dog food.

GRACIE: My cat Shady thinks he is a dog.

RESEARCHER: What about your attendance, Gracie how is that?

GRACIE: I think I have only missed five days this year.
**RESEARCHER:** What about suspensions? Have you missed school because of suspensions? Is that the five days you are talking about?

**GRACIE:** No. I missed one day because my brother was coming home from South Carolina and I stayed at home with my Mom to see him, one day I was sick, and the other three days I was suspended.

**RESEARCHER:** What about for each class, do you attend most of your classes?

**GRACIE:** I try to but if I don’t I do get the work done though.

**RESEARCHER:** Well good. What about your participation in extracurricular activities such as clubs, organizations, sports?

**GRACIE:** I joined the drama club and I am on the swim club for Coach Vaughn.

**RESEARCHER:** Ok well good. What about middle school, did you belong to any clubs or organizations or participate in sports?

**GRACIE:** In middle school I was on the cheerleading team for one year and I quit that to be on the basketball team.

**RESEARCHER:** Alright so you have always participated in other stuff besides your classes?

**GRACIE:** Yes.

**RESEARCHER:** Do you feel like you have the same opportunities as boys in your school now?

**GRACIE:** Yes.

**RESEARCHER:** Do you feel that there is just as many clubs for boys and girls.

**GRACIE:** Yeah other than football, I think girls should be able to have a football team.
RESEARCHER: What about any classes or programs that are designed to help girls excel or give them assistance at Creekside? Is there anything here just for females?

GRACIE: I don’t think so although I did see this paper on the wall one day for female orientation regarding sex and it said boys do not attend.

RESEARCHER: Ok. Did you find that interesting?

GRACIE: I did but I don’t have time for stuff like that.

RESEARCHER: What do you mean for stuff like that?

GRACIE: Like if it was anything for sex talk I already know stuff like that and I have too much going on.

RESEARCHER: If you could develop a program for females here at your school what do you think it would be?

GRACIE: Probably bullying females because they are different when they are around their friends. I had this girl in JROTC, when she sees me in the hall way if she is by herself she will wave at me and talk to me but if she is with her friends she is just a big bully.

RESEARCHER: Well then I want to ask you this question. Who do you think girls bully more? Do you think girls bully girls more or boys bully girls more?

GRACIE: Girls bullying girls.

RESEARCHER: Interesting. A lot of my research I have read how a lot of girls bully each other and it is increasing.

GRACIE: I think it is worse than boys bullying girls.

RESEARCHER: If you had to pick a goal for your club what would they be? What would you want it to accomplish?
**GRACIE**: I would want the bullying to stop so girls could get along better because bullying is getting real bad especially with girls and just try to get along no matter what we wear or what color we are and whether a boy likes me or not, we are all the same.

**RESEARCHER**: Gracie, Much of the recent research on females ignores females with disabilities. Do you ever feel ignored?

**GRACIE**: Not really.

**RESEARCHER**: Not at all, maybe by teachers?

**GRACIE**: No, not by the teachers.

**RESEARCHER**: When you think of special education do you think about mostly boys or do you think about yourself?

**GRACIE**: Myself.

**RESEARCHER**: Research also states that females with disabilities often experience lower self-esteem, depression at greater rates, less job opportunities, and become pregnant at an earlier age than their general education peers. How do you feel about these research findings?

**GRACIE**: You could get more depression because you get made fun of. For pregnancy it happens to anybody it don’t just happen to girls with disabilities.

**RESEARCHER**: It said also had less job opportunities and lower self esteem. Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself.

**GRACIE**: I have heard plenty of people being accepted to colleges and have good jobs.

**RESEARCHER**: With a disability?

**GRACIE**: Yes but it is really where you go and what the job requires.
RESEARCHER: So you would probably disagree then with most of these research findings. Now you did say depression and maybe about a low self-esteem, so do you think females with disabilities feel poorly about themselves.

GRACIE: I think that it is the other people that make it out to be like that because like me my brother for example if we ever get into fights he calls me retarded and stuff because I am in the slow classes. It hurts me a little bit and you could get depressed and you could have a low self-esteem if it gets to you for too long but I get over it.

RESEARCHER: Gracie, we’ve talked a lot about your academic performance, plans after high school along with how you get through your day being with mostly boys including behavioral expectations, suspensions, and attendance in school. Therefore, I would like to conclude with a couple of questions to recap what we have been discussing. Tell me if you feel that your academic performance would be better if there were more girls in each of your classes.

GRACIE: I don’t think it would be no different and it may be even worse because they may try me. If there were more girls in the room chances are I wouldn’t get along with them because girls keep up a lot of stuff. If there were more girls in the room that I did get along with, I probably would socialize with them too much and not get my work done plus if they are not starting drama they may have drama in their lives that would include me in it to help work out their problems.

RESEARCHER: Tell me if you think you would attend more classes, get into less trouble, or be more involved with the total school program if you had more girls in class with you.
GRACIE: Actually if I had more girlfriends I probably might skip class if they suggested or wanted me to but since I hang out with guys mostly I don’t worry about that because I wouldn’t guys.

RESEARCHER: Do you think being with males most of the school day hinders you from achieving or behaving the best you can? How?

GRACIE: Not at all.

RESEARCHER: It sounds like you feel pretty good about yourself and you know that you are a valuable person and very capable. I think that is fabulous. Gracie, I want to thank you for your honesty and your cooperation. I truly appreciate all of you help.

GRACIE: Your welcome, it was fun.
APPENDIX I
SAMPLE OBSERVATION NOTES

Observations:

**Brandy**, Hispanic female with Learning Disabilities, 12th grade, 18 years old

2nd period – Child Development (large group setting, regular education)
17 female students, 3 male students, one Black female teacher

**Brandy** is sitting at a table with one other female. She is looking in her bag for something. It appears that the class is setting up for presentations. **Brandy** goes to another table to share something with a group of girls. The teacher then asks **Brandy** if her group was ready to present. They said no but went ahead and got ready. There was a glitch with the projector and/or was not saved properly so they were unable to make their presentation. She then goes back to her table, complains of a headache and puts her head down. No other interaction was noted for the remainder of the observation.

3rd period – US History (small group setting, SEC class)
4 Black boys, one White boy, 3 girls: one White, one Black, and one Hispanic (**Brandy**)
One White female teacher

The bell rings and **Brandy** situates herself in the front of the room but positions herself behind a large map attempting to block anyone’s view of her who may be passing by (there is a window I the door of the classroom). She follows the teacher’s directions: gets out her textbook and notebook and begins the lesson with the rest of the class. After a few minutes, someone knocks on the door. **Brandy** then gets up and moves along side the wall so the person at the door can not see her. It was a teacher from next door and
Brandy appears relieved and returns to her seat. Class resumes and Brandy seems to be attending to the lesson. She then speaks to the boy sitting next to her to the point the teacher redirects them both. Both students readily comply but they begin talking again in a few minutes. By this point, the lecture is over and students are given work to complete independently. Brandy and the other students begin to work but get off task quickly discussing something of a personal nature. The teacher intervenes and redirects and they go back to work. It appears they use each other for peer assistance to get the assignment completed in the allotted time given. Interaction between the students continues with the exception of the White girl who seems to prefer or is working by herself until the White boy gets up and goes to sit beside her. It appears he is giving her some of the answers or is trying to be sociable. Brandy continues to interact with the students at her table until it is time for the bell. She then gets up and stands near the door so she can leave the second the bell rings.

4th period – Family and Consumer Science (large group setting, regular education)

14 female students, 9 male students, one Black female teacher

There is a culmination/celebration activity going on to end a unit combining two other classes. It appears to be a fashion show and dance. Students are in the hall and in the classroom. Some are watching the activities in the hall while others are inside the room socializing. Brandy is standing at the door watching the dancing in the hall. She appears to be dancing right inside the door with a male student but looks a little shy and refuses to go into the mainstream with the other students (the teacher reported that she declined to participate in the fashion show). Brandy continuously goes back and forth from inside the room to the doorway. She never really ventures out into the hallway with the majority
of the students. It appears she is trying to “fade into the woodwork” or be very inconspicuous. She comments to one of the male students, “You’re in my way, I can’t see.” The bell rings which ends the festivities and the students head to lunch.

Lunchroom

As the observer walks through the cafeteria that same day, she spots Brandy eating lunch. She notices that Brandy is sitting with what appears to be a group of friends – all Hispanic, none of whom were seen while classroom observations were being conducted.

5th period – Occupational Awareness (small group setting, SEC class)

4 male Black students, 2 female students: One White and one Black female

One Black, female teacher

When the observer walked in the room, she noticed that Brandy was sitting near the wall (possibly so no one could see her as they walked past) at a table away from everyone else. All other students were sitting in desks. Brandy appeared to be working on a different assignment from everyone else and while the teacher addressed the group, she appeared not to be listening and made no eye contact with the teacher. The teacher asks the class a direct question and Brandy looks up and correctly answers the question without any prompts. The teacher gives her positive feedback and she then returns to her work which I later find is make-up work because she had been absent several days in the past couple of weeks. The teacher asks another question and Brandy, once again, looks up, answers the question correctly and goes back to doing what she had been doing previously. The teacher then put on a video tape; Brandy appeared to be paying attention and no other interaction was noted.
6th period – Economics (small group, SEC class)

2 Black males, 2 females: one Black and one Hispanic (Brandy)

One White female teacher

The observer walks in at the beginning of class. Instruction has not begun. Brandy is sitting at the very back of the room beside one of the Black males in the classroom talking. When instruction begins Brandy stands her book up on her desk. The teacher addresses her and asks her to place her book flat so she can see her face. Brandy responds by saying, “I was reading,” but complies. The teacher begins the lesson by reviewing the previous day’s objective. Brandy and the boy next to her are engaged in conversation. The teacher asks the class a question and Brandy responds incorrectly and goes back to talking with her classmate. The teacher asks another question and she responds again verbally and incorrectly. She then continues to interact with the boy sitting next to her and this time the teacher reprimands her. She stops talking without any further redirection or conversation. The teacher then asks someone to read and Brandy volunteers (the observer is surprised because when she had her in class the year before she rarely ever would read aloud). She is doing a good job; she reads a couple of paragraphs but the boy next to her corrects her on one of the words and she automatically lets him take over the passage. He continues reading until the passage is complete. No other interaction was noted. Brandy seemed to be attentive throughout the lesson.