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**An investigation of the educational aspirations of high school
female learners**

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ABSTRACT

Researchers hold numerous perceptions of the educational aspirations and future career choices of teenage girls. Studies argue that factors such as the curriculum, teachers' and parents' attitudes, the impact of HIV/AIDS, and teenage pregnancy, influence girls' future educational and occupational hopes and dreams either positively or negatively. Other researchers claim that learners' career choice is limited by their potential and school performance. The existing literature also suggests that girls have lower self-esteem and levels of achievement than boys.

[†]This research seeks to gain insight into high school girls' perceived academic and vocational prospects. The research was carried out in an interpretive paradigm. Six secondary school female learners from one school participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews were the core method of data collection, supplemented by questionnaires and a focus group interview. As teenagers, the girls were expected to already have started to think about their future hopes and dreams. The findings revealed that all the girls seemed to experience school as a place where they could acquire knowledge about what they needed to make them autonomous and successful in adult life. For them, their parents remained their major significant others. They regarded fear of poverty as a major factor motivating them to achieve their educational and vocational aspirations. Peer pressure appeared not to be a major determinant of these girls' successes in school. The girls believed that there is a relationship between their academic performance and their future vocational choice. In addition, the girls did not see boys as a threat to their climbing the ladder of success.

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CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores some of the links between girls' educational performance and their career aspirations. It also highlights some of the qualities girls believe they possess which either help or hinder their achievement of the academic goals they set for themselves. I have also attempted to examine their self-perception when they compare themselves to their male counterparts.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) claimed that an unequal burden of domestic and family responsibilities hitherto weighs heavily upon girls (2003). This inevitably impacts to a greater or lesser degree on their educational ambitions and the resulting career opportunities offered them by society. Archer, Halshall and Hollingworth noted that "many girls' and young women's aspirations and expectations have undergone various shifts in relation to issues such as marriage ..., careers and educational choices" (2007:166). Despite such changes, however, "working-class young women continue to leave school earlier, and with fewer qualifications" (Archer et al., 2007:166).

I intend to build on some of the existing literature by looking at female learners' educational aspirations in the Namibian context. As my discussion of my sample selection will show, the girls who participated in this study are probably best described as coming from working class backgrounds. My research is firmly located within Namibia's education reform initiatives for girls' education whereby girls enjoy equal access to education to boys (Tjipueja, 2001).

1.2 THE CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

1.2.1 My motivation for undertaking this study

As a teacher with almost fourteen years experience I have frequently observed boys treating girls in a disrespectful way. For example, some boys swear at girls when they refuse to

behave in a subservient way as in picking up papers they (the boys) threw on the floor. In attempting to confront this situation I found it difficult to understand the claim from the learners that this was a 'cultural' thing whereby, girls' and women's place in society was destined to be in the home doing menial tasks. Girls were viewed as the ones who ought to look after children, prepare meals, do the laundry, clean the home and take care of sick people, such tasks being assigned purely on the basis of gender. The girls felt it was not their place to challenge or contradict boys. My response to this was, "Why can girls not *stand up* to their male counterparts and *fight* for the so-called rights of the girl child in our modern post-independent and democratic Namibian society?"

In the 20th and 21st century, education has been increasingly labelled a 'basic human right'. This implies that all citizens in a country are entitled to good quality education be they girls, boys, women or men. Yet recent research and educational statistical reports point repeatedly to obstacles that limit girls' chances to fulfil their academic potential (UNESCO, 2003). One reason for this could be a result of the tendency for many male and female teachers, including Namibian schools, to pay more attention to boys than to girls (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997; Lyle, 2003). I, myself, may unwittingly have been guilty of such discrepant behaviour. I frequently was under the impression that girls did not seem to need as much attention and guidance because I saw them as more disciplined and focused than boys.

I have come to realize, however, that one cannot ignore the important role that teachers play in young people's lives. Teachers are 'significant others' who profoundly affect learners' performance (Robertson, 2004). Since teachers are one of children's most important significant others, especially in the high school, I began a process of introspection. As a teacher, my main concern was to ask whether I might also be an unwitting part of the problem. I asked myself whether I perhaps contribute to girls developing a low self-esteem in the classroom compared to their male counterparts. Do I really set an 'anti-stereotypical' example that encourages female learners to adopt a changing attitude, not only towards education, but also towards greater equality in other spheres of life?

I naively thought that with the introduction of equal educational opportunities for girls and women in Namibia, and with teaching and learning becoming more learner-centered, teachers - as the 'reform agents' - would start to play a more enlightened role with regard to promoting equal education for girls in Namibian schools. Teachers could help female

educational needs of 17894 high school learners and employed 647 teachers, with a learner:teacher ratio of 28:1 for the senior secondary phase. Some schools in the region have classroom ratios as high as 36:1, but there are also some smaller schools with only between 19 and 24 learners per class.

My research took place at a previously disadvantaged (non-white) school. Since Namibia had been regarded as a fifth province of South Africa during South Africa's apartheid regime, the majority of Namibia's learners suffered from the racial and discriminatory policies enforced by the South African apartheid system on the Namibian education system (Avenstrup, 1999). Inferior Bantu education was introduced under South Africa's colonial regime. Black children attended poorly managed schools with little or no resources and were taught by under- and in some cases, unqualified teachers (Swarts, 2001).

This particular school was established in the apartheid era. It catered for the educational needs of a diverse population including Otjiherero, Otjiwambo, Nama and Coloured learners and; even refugee learners from Angola.

Despite the Namibian Ministry of Education's goal of ensuring all children have access, equity, quality and democracy with regard to education, the learners at this particular school continue to suffer some significant measure of inferior educational provision. This particular school experiences an ongoing shortage of teachers, desks and chairs and, textbooks. It lacks other modern educational resources such as computers. As girls and as members of a previously disadvantaged group, the female learners at the school were thus potentially doubly disadvantaged.

The following table shows total learner numbers at this particular school.

Table 1: Summary of enrolment as on 03 November 2006.

Grade	Boys	Girls	Total
8	117	135	252
9	95	144	239
10	91	111	202
11	72	93	165
12	101	106	207
Total	476	589	1065

From the total number of learners at the school, it is possible to work out that the boy:girl ratio is approximately 45:55. The higher ratio of female learners enrolled would seem to lend support to a claim made by Tjipueja that in Namibia girls appear to stay on longer in high school than their male counterparts (2001:4).

The teaching staff of this institution comprises 38 teachers, creating a learner:teacher ratio of 28:1. The teachers at this particular school are predominantly female; the female to male ratio being 25:13.

1.2.3 The study

Prior to independence, Namibian girls and women were “marginalized and disadvantaged” (Kleiner, as cited in Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997:7). Many were neglected, and deprived of their right to attend school. Experience in Namibia showed that if parents were “to choose which of their children to educate girls are the ones likely to be left out of school” (UNICEF, 2003:5). Most girls went through cultural practices such as initiation rituals – taught at special initiation schools away from home - where they learned about adult life (Anderson-Levitt, Bloch, & Soumaré, 1998). On their return they could marry a man chosen by their parents and were, therefore, denied the opportunity to finish school. This practice continues to operate in certain Namibian societies. In some of the San communities, for instance, many San girls “get married as early as nine and 10 years” (Tjaronda, 2007:3)¹.

Post-independence brought in the new Ministry of Education and Culture with a different mindset: “... compulsory education for all ... irrespective of ... gender ...” (Tjipueja, 2001:2). Today large numbers of females attend school and complete their education (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997).

* My investigation will be framed against this background with the purpose of investigating female learners’ awareness of their educational aspirations. My experience at the school where I teach shows various groups of girls who under-perform in comparison to boys and their counterparts at other schools. Thus, I wanted to investigate whether their low

¹ San girls from two regions in Namibia have benefited from Namibia’s implementation of compulsory education. The Forum for Women Educationalists in Namibia (FAWENA), with financial assistance from the USAID’s Ambassadors Girls Scholarship Program, “is ... one of the activities geared towards helping San girls stay in school” (Tjaronda, 2007:3).

performance is a reflection of low self-esteem and if it is linked to low aspirations and career expectations. My research draws on an interpretive perspective. It seeks to focus on individuals and how their social context influences their identity development and self-esteem.

Numerous studies (Haihambo, 1996; Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998; Brenner, 1998; UNESCO, 2003) that have been conducted over the years examined the adolescent females' perception of the self in relation to education. Although most of these studies were conducted outside Namibia, they shed light on the Namibian educational development of adolescent females. Therefore, I believe it is worthwhile re-visiting these studies in order to position my work within a broader context relevant to Namibia. Anderson-Levitt et al. (1998:103) found that the majority of teachers in Guinea had lower expectations for girls' academic achievement than for boys'. Also, in Liberia, "girls typically received fewer questions from teachers and fewer responses from classmates" (Brenner, 1998:136). In this regard teachers may not really be aware of how they perhaps contribute to a reduction in girls' opportunities and to girls' failure to develop a positive self-image. I regard it as essential that girls' self-esteem be improved; that they be encouraged to believe more strongly in their own abilities.

In a study conducted in Namibia, Haihambo (1996) claimed that girls with low socio-economic status had reduced self-expectations and lacked educational ambitions. Similarly, Lawrence (1996) observed that children with high self-expectations are more likely to be confident in social situations and in schoolwork activities. Wylie (1961) claimed that the degree of success could lead the subject to envisage attainment of more or less prestigious educational goals with correlated effects on overall self-regard. In addition, Korman claimed that adolescent female learners regard social approval as an essential factor for educational aspirations (as cited in Westaway & Skuy, 1984). However, Kobak discovered that adolescent girls have difficulty in discussing future goals and plans with their "pre-occupied mothers" (as cited in Young, Paseluikho, & Valach, 1997:43).

A growing number of studies (Gilbert & Taylor, 1992; Arnot, 2002) show that girls' educational aspirations are moving away from traditional roles. This is attributed to feminist movements that help to make girls aware of the need to accomplish particular levels of independence. These findings inspired me to look at the educational experiences, performances, aspirations, career ambitions, expectations and occupational choices of female

adolescents in a Namibian high school. I also wanted to find out something about how girls perceive themselves in relation to their male counterparts. It is my hope that my study may help enlighten female learners about their educational rights and responsibilities.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My research questions are:

- What factors influence the educational performance of female learners?
- Does a relationship exist between female learners' educational performance and career aspirations?
- How do they perceive themselves in relation to their male counterparts?

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF MY RESEARCH —

Adolescents often appear acutely self-conscious about what other people think of them. For better or worse, this can impinge upon their developing 'sense of self'. What effect can a teacher have upon a girl's sense of self? What effect might the peer group have upon a girl's sense of self? How might these affect her longer-term aspirations?

My research seeks to explore some aspects of the girls' selected for the study self-identity and self-aspirations with special reference to their educational aspirations. Self-identity, in this study, refers to "the meaning attached by a person to herself as a person, which means that it is the answer to the question 'Who am I?'" (Gouws & Kruger, 1996:86). Self-aspiration, according to Gouws and Kruger, means how individual learners rate their success or failure in achievement activities; whether they achieved what they envisaged (1996).

I hope my study will contribute to efforts to make girls more aware of educational and job opportunities in the market, and of the importance of being more independent in all areas of their lives. It is also hoped that this study will help to make teachers, and indeed girls themselves, more aware from an early age that a girl can be just as competent in any field of study as any boy.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF MY STUDY

In Chapter One I describe the context in which my research took place. I also highlight the focus of my research and give the rationale for conducting this particular study. I then explain the main issues to be investigated as well as what I intend to achieve at the end.

Chapter Two explores what is already known - or not yet known - as regards girls' educational aspirations. I also illuminate the relation between my study and the existing literature on the topic, and try to show how the literature to some extent 'shaped' my own research design decisions.

Chapter Three examines the methodological issues and describes the site selection plus some features of the selected sample and the methods (research techniques) I used for collecting data. I then explore issues of validity and reliability, as well as the approach I used in my data analysis. Finally, I discuss some limitations to my study.

In Chapter Four I describe the processing and analysis of the raw data. I categorise the data into three main categories: namely, some factors which appear to limit the educational hopes and dreams of the girls' who contributed to my study; secondly, some possible links between the selected girls' educational performance and their career choices; and thirdly, the girls' self-perceptions relative to boys'.

Chapter Five summarises my core findings relative to the literature reviewed. I also focus on some lessons learned from the research undertaking as a whole, and make some recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of this research is to explore some of the links between a small sample of adolescent girls' educational achievements and their vocational aspirations. This chapter therefore, provides an overview of some of the literature dealing with educational aspirations of female high school learners; as well as how they view themselves when they compare themselves with boys. In reviewing literature pertaining to factors that hamper girls' achievements, I have chosen to organise my discussion under the following sub-headings:

- A brief overview of some patterns regarding gender and education;
- Factors affecting female learners' education;
- Female learners' educational performance and vocational choice;
- Female learners' self-perceptions relative to their male counterparts.

I have located my literature review within an international, an African and a Namibian context. In the following section, I focus briefly on some patterns in the gender/education relationship.

2.2 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SOME PATTERNS REGARDING GENDER AND EDUCATION

Historically, less attention has been given to the education of women as education for boys was seen to be more important than education for girls. Girls' education pre-20th century tended to be "limited and narrowly defined" (Gilbert & Taylor, 1992:20). This should be seen in the context of the fact that notions of the desirability of universal education only really came to the fore in the 20th century (Francis, 2000).

Kenway and Willis noted that various "feminist discourses ... compete for recognition, acceptance and funds" (1990:1) to provide equal educational opportunities for girls and women. Partially in response to these sorts of pressure, Australia's education system was

specifically restructured in the 1980s to encourage girls “to be more like boys in order to get on in the world” (Chisholm & September, 2005:42). In most westernised countries from North America and Western Europe the gender parity goal (equal numbers of boys and girls from more or less the same age groups entering the education system) in primary and secondary education was achieved between 2000 and 2005 (UNESCO, 2003:8). In this same report it was noted that in Latin America and the Caribbean “girls’ enrolment has increased faster than those of boys over the decade to 2000” (2003:6). Chisholm and September noted too that more recently girls have even tended to dominate boys (numerically) in different levels of education in many western countries, *inter alia* Britain, America, Canada, Germany and France, and even South Africa (2005:42).

This notwithstanding Chisholm and September’s inclusion of South Africa in the above claim, disparities in male and female educational opportunities in Africa are well documented. The Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1996 in Beijing, China, found that approximately 60 million girls still had no access to primary education, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1996:47). Statistics suggest that although there *have* been substantial improvements in girls’ access to schooling in Africa, girls nevertheless, remain less likely than boys to attend school at every level (Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998:99).

In the Liberian Republic, for example, female learners have lower academic aspirations than male learners as illustrated by “high dropout rates ... and lower rates of literacy for women” (Brenner, 1998:132). This situation seemed to be due to traditional beliefs that prevail in some parts of Africa “where women are confined to the home” (UNESCO, 2003:12). El-Sanabary and Futhane suggest that the reason why, in Namibia’s neighbouring country, South Africa, girls and women are comparatively better represented at all levels of education is because South African parents have possibly become better aware of the benefits of education for their daughters (1999:9).

A number of Namibian studies have focused on enhancing the quality of life for the girl child and on promoting respect for girls (*inter alia*, Hubbard & Tapscott, 1991; Mendelsohn, Lewis, Hua & Fuller, 1995; Kasanda, Phiri & Kamoruao, 1996).^{*} The focus of these studies was on how girl children could be encouraged to complete their school careers and join the job market in the same numbers as boy children (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997:18). I hope

that my study too will make its own small contribution to an increased awareness about girls' educational and vocational opportunities.

In December 1979 the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (UNESCO, 2003:3). This convention ruled that every woman and girl should participate in and enjoy national life on an equal basis. Namibia signed this convention in November 1992. It was agreed that new laws would be put in place to ensure that women became freer to participate in all areas of national life (Kalimba & Nambira, 1998:14).

The Namibian Ministerial policy document, *Toward education for all* noted:

Indeed, our schools ... should themselves become models of egalitarian social institutions in which all individuals can develop their own potential and are not held back by ... gender. To achieve that we must address effectively sexual harassment, early pregnancy (especially where teachers are involved) ... and related issues ...

(Namibia. MEC, 1993:136)

According to Otaala (1994), a major goal of the National Programme of Action in Namibia was to enhance the social status of women, to eliminate discrimination against them in all spheres of their lives and to contribute to their empowerment so that they could become active participants in national development. Tjipueja (2001) claimed that as a result of the Namibian education reform, significant progress has been made to grant girls more equal access to primary and secondary education. Tjipueja's study found that more boys than girls were enrolled in the primary level, but a tendency existed for boys to drop out at the higher grades (2001:4). He found these enrolment figures unusual when compared to other African countries. It may be that Namibian girls become increasingly aware of the importance of continuing their secondary education up to the highest possible grade. However, as Kalimba and Nambira noted, girls who manage to stay on in school a little longer than boys do "still suffer from traditional attitudes, early marriage and pregnancy, bias in teaching materials and sexual harassment in school" (1998:19).

In light of the MECs comments about sexual harassment and teenage pregnancy, one recognises how important it is that these issues be addressed. Such attitudes can only

diminish adolescent girls' self-respect and self-esteem. In the sections that follow I present an overview of some of the factors that may limit girls' academic progress.

2.3 FACTORS AFFECTING FEMALE LEARNERS' EDUCATION

Female learners' involvement, accomplishments and continuation in the school system depend on a variety of factors both in school and beyond the classroom and school itself. Various studies (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997; Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998; Brenner, 1998) have been undertaken in various parts of the world to investigate factors within education systems that may cause female learners to underachieve, *inter alia*: aspects of curriculum design and delivery, teachers' attitudes, parental attitudes, the impact of HIV/AIDS, and teenage pregnancy. I discuss each of these factors separately in an attempt to highlight how they may impact upon the educational opportunities and aspirations of adolescent female learners.

Many girls in various parts of the world are the first female members in their families to attend school (Aikman, Unterhalter & Challender, 2005). For many of these girls gender inequality is a feature that "pervades their educational experience" (Aikman et al., 2005:44).

The education system of Namibia has been marked by a history of gender inequalities that reduced the opportunities for girls to obtain all levels of education. In a study undertaken by Robinson-Awana, Kehle and Jensen (1986), it was found that in general girls are less eager to attend school than boys, they withdraw earlier and they seem to attain lower grades and test scores. However, as my own investigation will show, the girls who participated in my study do not fit this profile. They challenge this pattern. Kasanda, Phiri and Kamoruao emphasised the importance of addressing barriers that prevent Namibian children from attending school (1996:5).

In a study done by UNESCO, it was found that:

The difficulties that hinder girls' access to primary education do not prevent them from performing as well as, or better than, their male peers once they are enrolled. This does not imply a smooth school career for girls, as other problems – puberty, early marriage, pregnancy – have a strong influence on completing the full cycle.

(2003:7)

Just as factors such as adolescence, early marriage and pregnancy might prevent some girls from satisfactorily completing their schooling, so too could biases in the curriculum. In the next section, I explore the notion of how aspects of curriculum may have either a positive or negative impact on female learners' academic aspirations.

2.3.1 Aspects of curriculum design and delivery

Banks and Banks (as cited in Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997) are of the opinion that biases in the curriculum for example, stereotyping and invisibility of females in textbook illustrations, impact negatively on the educational aspirations of girls. The hidden curriculum makes little contribution to rectifying this inequality, especially in circumstances where "pupils have little or no control over what they learn and how they learn it" (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000:301). Women's issues are often portrayed in a stereotypical way. This can contribute to the way in which children perceive themselves (Owens, 1987). My study is embedded in an interpretive research paradigm that, amongst other things, "highlights the importance of emotions in shaping people's ... self-concepts" (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine, 2006:10). Sandstrom et al. claimed that "our most powerful feelings are attached to our images of self" (2006:11). These 'images of self', self-concept, is, according to *inter alia* Gouws and Kruger (1996) the most important part of a person's personality. It determines how an individual perceives herself and whether that "perception ... [is] either positive or negative" (Gouws & Kruger, 1996:6).

With regard to educational policy in Britain in the 1980s, the "Conservative administration led by Margaret Thatcher ... often made [its] lack of concern with equity issues explicit" (Arnot, David & Weiner, as cited in Francis, 2000:6). Notwithstanding this apparently explicit lack of concern, the British Education Reform Act of 1988 did put in place a "compulsory curriculum for schools and introduced standardized testing of pupils in English, Maths and Science at different stages of compulsory education" (Francis, 2000:6). This intervention was so successful that "by the early 1990s it became evident that girls' GCSE results in these areas were improving and, by 1995 they matched boys' achievements in these subjects for the first time" (Francis, 2000:6). Girls have now overtaken boys in their educational performance to the extent that growing concern has been expressed about boys' underachievement in Britain and other Western nation-states (Francis, 2000; Francis, as cited in Archer et al., 2007). More recently "evidence that girls are outperforming boys in several developed countries has created a public stir ..." (UNESCO, 2003:16).

Moving now to Africa, Brenner claimed that Liberian boys and girls follow the same curriculum (1998:138). Nevertheless, in some other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, little subject choice is allowed by the curriculum (Brenner, 1998). For example, a study done in secondary schools in Senegal revealed that “the structure of the science curriculum is not designed to address the needs of girls” (Bouya, as cited in Brenner, 1998:177). The number of African girls “... failing ... science suggests that it may be school ... science that is actually failing [emphasis mine] the girls” (Zietsman, 1997:1).

Closer to home, various forms of gender bias were identified in the South African curriculum for both primary and secondary schools (Truscott, as cited in El-Sanabary & Futhane, 1999:12). For example “girls take subjects such as needlework, handicrafts, house crafts, and typing while boys take woodwork, metalwork, technical drawings, or agriculture” (El-Sanabary & Futhane, 1999:12). Girls’ limited access to Maths and Science was seen to have a negative influence on their future potential: “primary school girls are not expected to be interested in Math and Science or to do well in these subjects when they study them” (El-Sanabary & Futhane, 1999:12). El-Sanabary and Futhane cite the concern expressed at the Beijing Platform for Actions and Declaration, that girls are frequently denied freedom to choose subjects such as Maths and Science which “could provide knowledge that would improve their lives and enhance their employment opportunities” (1999:12). As my own study will show, the curriculum followed by my participants in the school where I carried out my research, did not limit female learners to a particular ‘girls-only’ choice of subjects. They were indeed free to choose whatever subject they opted for.

Textbooks too, fail to contribute much to portraying girls’ position in society in a positive way (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997). Textbooks may sometimes reinforce girls’ low educational aspirations (Aikman et al., 2005). In Eastern Europe, “textbooks from several countries only portray women in their home environments” (UNESCO, 2003:15). Science textbooks often fail to relate to “... girls’ and women’s daily experiences and ... to recognize the contributions of women scientists” (El-Sanabary & Futhane, 1999:12). On a more positive note however, El-Sanabary and Futhane (1999) noted that with the assistance of USAID, the South African Department of Education (DoE) had made efforts to produce gender-sensitive textbook materials. The DoE ensured that girls too appear in illustrations on an equal basis as boys, and in anti-stereotyped roles (El-Sanabary & Futhane, 1999:12).

As regards Namibian circumstances, Kasanda and Shaimemanya (1997) claimed that there is evidence of a change in Namibian schools with regard to subject timetabling that benefits female learners. For example, Science and Technical Drawing no longer 'happen' to be "... offered at the same time as home economics ..." (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997:12). It takes time though, for effective change to take place. At the institution where I am currently working, for example, the hidden curriculum still sends out stereotypical messages about gender. Only the male teachers drive the school minibus. It is also their responsibility (with the assistance of some boys) to prepare the sports field for athletics and other sports activities. On the other hand, during athletics meetings female teachers are usually responsible for preparing and serving refreshments (with the assistance of some girls) to colleagues and learners.

Cooley viewed the social world as a "giant looking glass (mirror), which constantly reflects back images to the individual" (as cited in Robertson, 2004:16). Teachers are "important 'mirrors' to learners' emerging sense of their own [academic] 'worth'" (Robertson, 2004:16). Teachers in the role of significant others, have the power to be either a positive or a negative influence over learners' self-concept (Robertson, 2004). In the following section, I discuss how teacher attitudes can impact on learners' educational aspirations.

2.3.2 Teachers' attitudes

Teachers play a key role in learners' developing sense of self (Robertson, 2004). They constitute "the people in an individual's social world whose views are especially important to him/her" (Mead, as cited in Robertson, 2004:15). The responses of teachers can have a crucial effect on learners' performance and attitudes to school (Francis, 2000). Children need the educational assistance of teachers. Such assistance helps them develop positive self-concepts (Gouws & Kruger, 1996).

According to Gilbert and Taylor, Australian teachers selected teaching aids more relevant to boys, had higher expectations for boys' potential and spent more classroom time with them (1992). Keddie's research (as cited in Robertson, 2004) showed, for instance, that teachers expect A-stream learners to perform better than C-stream learners. This might easily cause learners to become reluctant and, as a result, adopt a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, as cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2000). If a teacher's attitude sends out the message to learners that he/she values one party more than another, learners who are

'expected' to perform less well may adopt a negligent attitude towards their schoolwork (Robertson, 2004). Learners might then behave in ways that have a deteriorating effect on their school work. This might inevitably contribute to a lowering of self-esteem and, consequently, lowered educational aspirations (Zietsman, 1997). In similar vein, classroom observations in France and the United States suggested that teachers tend to pay more attention to boys than to girls even if girls make up the majority (Sadker & Sadker, as cited in Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998:128). Both Zietsman (1997:3) and Francis (2000:138) found that teachers persist in spending on average more time interacting with male learners in the classroom. Teachers also seemed to "pay more attention to boys and give them twice as much individual instruction on tasks as they give girls" (Serbin & O'Leary, as cited in Owens, 1987:384).

According to Zietsman (1997), the reason why teachers sometimes, unwittingly, pay so much attention to boys, is that boys need more discipline than their female counterparts. Teachers might view girls as hardworking, obedient and 'silent' learners who do not require much assistance with school tasks. Furthermore, most girls always present neat and tidy work that may so easily be misinterpreted as 'good' work (Owens, 1987). Leach argued that boys are more likely to be "exposed to praise for academic accomplishment while girls receive praise for behaviour" (Leach, as cited in Zietsman, 1997:6). Similarly, according to the Harvard School of Education and The American Association of University Women (2002), teachers tended to pose more difficult questions to boys. They were also more eager to positively acknowledge boys intellectual contributions than girls.

In relation to African circumstances, research in Liberian classrooms indicated that male teachers made it very explicit that they would like female learners to participate in lessons, but they seemed less comfortable interacting with the girls (Brenner, 1998). Some of the teachers complained that the girls were too quiet and others criticised them for having tried to move too close to the teachers. The researchers wrote that this kind of criticism was "more prevalent ... at higher grade levels when girls were entering adolescence" (Brenner, 1998:140). Francis (2000:4) pointed out that "girls were marginalized and belittled in the classroom, the victims of systematic discrimination from male classmates and teachers and the school system itself".

Interestingly, although Anderson-Levitt et al. anticipated in their study that the majority of teachers in Liberia would have lower expectations for girls' academic achievement than for boys', the researchers found that in some schools in Liberia teachers did in fact frequently call on girls and motivate them to participate (1998:124). In certain schools in Liberia girls told the researchers that "teachers always called on girls frequently" (Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998:112). Teachers, in their turn, testified that it was a "deliberate strategy to help girls learn" (Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998:112). Anderson-Levitt et al. (1998) cited other research, for example that of Davison and Kanyuka of African girls who behaved in ways different from what might be generally expected. Davison and Kanyuka's study showed that girls could also adopt 'anti-stereotypical' behaviour; they reported on "girls ... insisting that they be heard and fighting for the right to learn" (as cited in Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998:102).

In Namibian schools, many male and female teachers appear to reflect gender biased attitudes toward learners in that they expected male learners to perform better than their female counterparts (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997). Such gender biases may have then been "unconsciously reproduced in their classrooms" (Ernest, as cited in Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997).

Parents too, have tremendous power over their children's future hopes and dreams. They can create an environment for academic failure or success (Tjipueja, 2001; Lyle, 2003). I explore parental attitudes with regard to learners' educational aspirations in the next section.

2.3.3 Parental attitudes

Researchers consistently showed parents are the single biggest factor influencing children's school performance (Brenner, 1998; Kanchanachitra, 1999). Parents' interest in their children's school environment and academic accomplishments has been shown to be major determinants of their educational aspirations. Research done in the United States of America, for example, indicated that parents "either involve themselves directly in their children's education or do not" (The role of school in United States adolescents' lives, 1999). According to Midwinter (as cited in Lyle, 2003), many parents are ignorant about how schools operate. For instance, female learners, in particular, may be trapped in classroom situations where, as noted in the previous section, teachers and male peers often make uncalled for derogatory remarks and would have no recourse to parental assistance in sorting this out.

Parents also depend heavily on their girls to help with household chores and tending animals. Boys have to attend school, because they are the ones who one day will get a good job and assist the family financially (Mweti & Van Wyk, 2005). However, Oakley argued that "... the expressive housewife-mother role is not necessary for the functioning of the family unit" She claimed that such perception is based on the "myths of male superiority and ... the domestic oppression of women" (Oakley, as cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2000:133).

In Thai societies some parents' oppression of women was so great that they forced their daughters into the sex industry in their search for an improved quality of life (Kanchanachitra, 1999:2). These girls were regarded as ungrateful if they did not fit in with their parents' demands. The expectation that they would take care of their parents in any way they could was placed on daughters more than on sons in Thai communities (Boonchalaksi & Guest, as cited in Kanchanachitra, 1999). Such cultural practices may well constrain girls' eagerness and commitment to successfully complete their school career. At the same time, it might also foster feelings of guilt about not assisting parents with household chores as traditionally expected from them (Kanchanachitra, 1999).

Tjipueja's writing about circumstances in Africa indicated that "enrolment and persistence of girls in school is further limited by the social expectation of girls that they should become good housewives and mothers" (2001:5). Many African parents, it is claimed, believe that a man may be less willing to marry a woman who is more educated than himself or whose profession might be too demanding to allow her sufficient time to take care of the children and the household (UNESCO, 2003:13). Liberian learners claimed that parents were less committed when it came to their daughters' education, especially if the girls were making little progress in general (Brenner, 1998). It seems to still be a big concern to parents in some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa that an educated daughter has fewer chances of marriage or having children in order to maintain the family name (The Beijing Declaration and The Platform for Action, 1996).

Research carried out in Limpopo Province, South Africa, reported on economically empowered women who experienced violence because their male partners viewed them as a threat (Julien & Majake, 2005:71). One of their male participant's responses was:

Men were so used to having power and control over women before the new, democratic South Africa ... women know their own rights and men feel threatened and abuse women since they feel it is the only way to show they [men] still have power.

(Julien & Majake, 2005:71)

There is evidence to suggest that in Namibia parents sometimes seem to almost unwittingly undermine their daughters' educational prospects. It has been reported, for example, that some Namibian parents contributed to girls' poor school attendance through being unwilling to risk the safety of their daughters if they have to walk long distances to school (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997:7). In sharp contrast to this concern, however, girls are often offered by their parents for early marriage, because of parents' fear of pregnancy that will jeopardise their (girls') chances of getting a good husband (Tjipueja, 2001:5). As my study will show, my participants' were fully supported by their parents to complete their school career successfully.

HIV/AIDS is also found to have a negative impact on learners' academic aspirations (Collins & Rau, 2000:51). The HIV/AIDS pandemic plays a significant role in "curtailing girls' right to education" (UNESCO, 2003:13). In the next section, I discuss the possible negative influence HIV/AIDS might have on girls' education.

2.3.4 The impact of HIV/AIDS

Substantial pressure is put on girl children to care for and support the terminally ill. Collins and Rau claimed that some African traditions force women to care for the terminally ill and thus "girls may be withdrawn from school to do so" (2000:12). Girls often have to forfeit their education to stand in for adults in carrying out household duties, take care of younger brothers and sisters and sometimes even take over parents' income-generating activities (Collins & Rau, 2000). In Swaziland, for example, school enrolment is documented as having diminished by 36% due to AIDS, which significantly involves girls (UNESCO, 1994:33). Similarly, in Lusaka, Zambia, girls were often expected to head households when both parents have died (Kelly, 2000). This led to "continuous late-coming to school or repeated absence from school, factors which inevitably affect the learning achievement of the child and which may ultimately lead to termination of school participation" (Kelly, 2000:51). He concluded that girls were often stigmatised or discriminated against after having gone through such an AIDS trauma (Kelly, 2000).

Very tragically, Nasheya (1999:62) found that a large number of women are infected with the HIV/AIDS virus because of gender discrimination that prevents women from determining their own sexual lives. Women simply do not have the power to demand safe sex from their male partners (The Beijing Declaration and The Platform for Action, 1996:60).

Writing about Namibian circumstances, Kasanda and Shaimemanya noted that adolescent female learners risk themselves contracting the HIV/AIDS virus as the man "... often demanded that the girl show her love by having unsafe [emphasis mine] sex ... with him" (1997:14). Research carried out in the Caprivi region investigated factors that contribute to the spread of Aids. Teenage girls were interviewed - an eighteen year old Grade Eleven learner said: "Girls here in Caprivi know that the easy way to make money is to sell their bodies to teachers, policemen and male nurses" (Mukonda (1998), in Grobler, n.d.:3). If they are infected with the virus, it can utterly destroy these girls' chances of making their educational hopes and dreams a reality. As my own study will show, my girls agreed with the fact that if girls have to take care of HIV/AIDS relatives it might jeopardise their educational aspirations as they will be forced to use valuable study time to care for such a patient. And, even if they escape the HIV/AIDS scourge, they are still vulnerable to the risk of premature pregnancy.

In the following section, I discuss the influence early pregnancy can have on the future educational hopes and dreams of teenage girls.

2.3.5 Teenage pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy is a worldwide problem. In a study done in the United States of America, for instance, many students identified pregnancy as one of the biggest problems faced by girls. These students added that having a child might cause all sorts of problems for a teenage girl such as "social changes, responsibilities of parenting, financial burdens, and whether to continue schooling" (The role of school in United States adolescents' lives, 1999). For example, Archer et al. mentioned a girl who "became pregnant ... and had to leave school (her baby was also very ill, which prevented her from returning to education)" (2007:171).

The problem of teenage pregnancy is perhaps most acutely felt, however, in poorer (developing) countries where adequate support structures may not be in place. A UNESCO

report (1994) revealed that about 18% of African women between the ages of 15 and 19 give birth every year, while 8% do so in Latin America and only 3% in Asia.

The prevalence of a high dropout rate among girls in African schools due to early pregnancy is a disturbing socio-cultural dilemma (Brenner, 1998). A new government policy on teenage pregnancy in some countries, *inter alia* Botswana, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia, states that girls have to wait for twelve months following delivery before they can return to school (UNESCO, 2003:20). Consequently, such girls would already have lost one year of secondary education.

In Namibia, teenage mothers make up 9% of the total number of pregnant women in the country (Iipingé & Lebeau, 2005). These researchers claimed that girls living in urban areas of Namibia are more likely to become pregnant than girls living in rural areas (Iipingé & Lebeau, 2005:48). In accordance with policy in Botswana and the other countries, Namibia has introduced a policy on teenage pregnancy which states that girls who get pregnant while attending formal schooling are not allowed to return to school within the year following giving birth (Namibia. National Gender Policy and National Plan of Action on Gender, 1998). If such girls decide to return to school after their babies have reached the age of one year, they may only pursue studies in a different school (Iipingé & Lebeau, 2005:41). With regard to the official policy on teenage pregnancy at the school where I conducted my research, female learners who got pregnant attended school until it was time to give birth. Thereafter they returned to school in order to finish the specific grade.

Poverty has been identified as a major contributing factor to Namibian teenage pregnancy (O'Meare & Hailongo, as cited in Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997:14). It is believed that "high levels of poverty ... create *additional* educational challenges for ... students" (Orr, Stone, & Stumbo, 2006:1). In addition, poverty is regarded as a "barrier to equal educational opportunity" (Bramley & Karley, 2005:6). Middleton and Ashworth also believed that a lack of finances might have an effect on children's "school attainment since parents may not be able to afford the ... books ... home computers, and other learning resources like reference books that can aid success" (Middleton & Ashworth, as cited in Bramley & Karley, 2005:6). Schoolgirls reach out for the financial assistance of so-called 'sugar daddies' who provide them with money to pay for their school development fund and other related expenses (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997). These relationships may result in pregnancies which

inevitably has a detrimental effect on the school career of these young girls, because they would now be occupied with all the responsibilities of motherhood. Furthermore, Archer et al. claimed that many school girls have 'secret boyfriends' – sugar daddies – who seemed to cause these girls to have lowering educational aspirations and/or attainment (2007). Interestingly, from my own experience, the girls who participated in my study also mentioned the word "sugar daddy". I discuss it in more detail in Chapter Four.

Teenage pregnancy can significantly hamper some girls' educational performance which, in turn, can negatively influence their vocational ambitions. In the next section, I explore the extent to which female learners' educational performance may link to their vocational aspirations.

2.4 FEMALE EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND VOCATIONAL CHOICE

Vocational choice results from a combination of factors. These include a student's opportunity to explore a variety of activities in the primary and secondary school years, success in these activities, the ability to continue and, in future years, to fulfil certain job requirements for entry into the job market. A student's occupational choice will also be restricted to some extent by his or her abilities and academic performance (Peters & Hansen, 1977).

In a study done in the United States of America, it was found that female adolescents who planned to enter non-traditional careers generally scored noticeably higher on academic ability, especially in Physical Science, Biology and Maths (Mussen, Conger, Kagan & Huston, 1984). These girls were described as being relatively autonomous, assertive and competent (Mussen et al., 1984). As Francis remarked, it is inspiring to find that female adolescents showed a deviation as far back as the 1980s from conventional and stereotyped paths (2000:7). Benskin and Pickering suggested that female learners felt that they had to perform better than their male counterparts in order to compete with them on even grounds in the workplace (as cited in Francis, 2000). In addition, many girls held the belief that where women and men proved equal in terms of performance, men would be appointed in a more challenging job at the expense of women and would be considered first for promotion (Francis, 2000).

Stereotypical views about girls' abilities in subjects like Maths and Science might have a detrimental effect on their attitudes towards these subjects, or towards careers which require knowledge of these subjects (El-Sanabary & Futhane, 1999). Gendered perceptions on future adult occupations might affect female learners' approaches and accomplishment in their academic work. In Chile, for instance, women are mostly employed in the education and health sectors, while men are employed in higher positions in the government, financing and banking (UNESCO, 2003:16). However, Francis (2000) found that female learners believed that their success at school would help them to gain employment. Girls see education as the means to provide them with the knowledge and the experience to make informed decisions with regard to career choices. They "attach particular importance to their educational achievement as an investment with which to combat any disadvantage they might face as a result of discrimination in the employment market" (Francis, 2000:92)

In many developing countries men continue to take the lead regarding economics and politics irrespective of boys' underachievement in school (UNESCO, 2003:16). In a study done in Nigeria, the researcher came to the conclusion that female learners' educational and vocational aspirations were significantly lower than those of male learners (Biraimah, as cited in Brenner, 1998). Nonetheless, it was argued that "women may require higher levels of attainment if they are to be successful in competition for jobs, equal pay and decision-making positions" (UNESCO, 2003:16).

The Namibian situation does not differ much from other African countries. In a study carried out at the University of Namibia, it was found that a huge number of students believed that female students perform below average in relation to male students with regard to technical subjects (Kasanda et al., 1996). Poverty forces some families to send their sons rather than their daughters to tertiary institutions consequently, "girls continue to face sharp discrimination" (UNESCO, 2003:6) in access to tertiary education. Thus, many female learners might not be inspired to try their best when entering the senior secondary phase as they know that their chances of being sent for further studies are scant compared with their male counterparts (UNESCO, 2003).

In developing countries such as Namibia, it seems that there are fewer places of employment as the country has a relatively smaller economic infrastructure. Girls consequently may face increased competition in the labour market.

Recent statistics show that in Namibia, women still tend to qualify in higher numbers as teachers and nurses than do men, whilst their male counterparts continue to occupy senior management positions either in the private or public sectors (Iipinga & Lebeau, 2005:21). As my own study will show, none of my participants opted to qualify as teachers or nurses. Their vocational aspirations ranged from becoming a doctor, engineer, accountant, financial manager, air hostess, fashion designer, journalist or disco jockey.

The focus of the next section attempts to shed light on how female learners perceive themselves in relation to their male counterparts.

2.5 FEMALE LEARNERS' SELF-PERCEPTIONS RELATIVE TO THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS

A strong self-concept is regarded as essential to learner success (Gouws & Kruger, 1996). The self-concept is the "image a person has of himself, and is unique, personal and highly meaningful to the person concerned" (Gouws & Kruger, 1996:6). A learner's self-esteem is claimed to be an "interdependent component of the self-concept" (Vrey, as cited in Gouws & Kruger, 1996:6). Gender is regarded as an essential part of a "successful social identity" (Davies, as quoted in Francis, 2000:15). Literature suggests that female learners frequently have a lowered sense of self-worth, and of aspiration, than do their male counterparts (Kenway & Willis, 1990).

Parents are believed to play a key role in their teenagers' lives (Burns, 1986; The role of school in United States adolescents' lives, 1999). When children enter the world of the adolescent however, opinions of parents are valued less as they are now more concerned with how peers perceive them; to 'fit in' becomes a priority (Bourne, 2001). Epstein found that "friends communicate expectations, exchange information, provide social reinforcement, or act as models for observational learning" (as quoted in Antonio, 2004:450). In the United States it was found that adolescents "come to define their own identity with the broader peer group" (The role of school in United States adolescents' lives, 1999). In addition, Wallace claimed that peer groups play an important role in "influencing members' attitudes towards the attainment of high grades, academic achievement, and aspirations for graduate study" (as quoted in Antonio, 2004:450).

Peer pressure has also been found to influence “the degree to which ... girls ... conform to expected gender roles” (Bourne, 2001:1). Bourne reported that:

Up until about grade six, girls’ performance in science and math are on a par with that of boys, but during adolescence girls’ test scores and level of expressed interest declines. The tendency is to abandon competition with boys in favor of placing more emphasis on relationships and on physical appearance.

(2001:1)

Peer groups provide a community that families fail to provide to their adolescents in that they focus on “communication and discussion about taboo subjects such as drugs, sex, and religion” (Bourne, 2001:1). And when adolescents search for social approval and security this might often be provided by teachers or peers in the classroom (Burns, 1986). Zietsman argued that “often girls ascribe their success to external influences such as peer assistance” (1997:2).

Burns noted that “some children employ academic attainment as an important index of self-worth” (1986:206). This view is reiterated in Perkey’s (more current) claim (as cited in Babb, 2004) that academic performance has an influence on self-perception. For instance, a female adolescent may feel more secure and proud of herself when she scores higher grades in an achievement test or examination than a male adolescent. Perkey (as cited in Babb, 2004) believed that learner’ self-regard decreases when a drop in academic performance is experienced.

Sears (as cited in Burns, 1986) claimed that eleven-year old male and female learners associated feminine attributes with low self-concepts. According to Stanworth (as cited in Burns, 1986), girls tend to underestimate their ability in relation to boys. Many girls have been indoctrinated by parents’ traditional values to believe they are incapable of performing academically better than boys (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997).

Nevertheless, not all girls are prepared to be on the receiving end of attitudes and images constructed by society. In Guinea, Anderson-Levitt et al.:

... saw some girls resist the cultural reproduction of gender differences, persisting against discouragement in its multiple forms. We saw some take positive action, participating in the construction of new images of what girls ... could do, with few models of these futures in front of them ... They want something different for

their lives than the difficult work of their mothers that rural girls see ... In short, they choose to continue.

(1998:126)

In Liberian classrooms a similar situation prevailed. Girls were more likely to believe that they could attain the same grades as boys, even though boys regarded themselves as more intelligent than girls (Brenner, 1998:139). According to Francis (2000), girls are generally prepared to work harder than boys.

In Namibia, both boys and girls were found to hold the view that boys perform academically better than girls (Kasanda et al., 1996). Kasanda and Shaimemanya (1997) found that the rationale behind girls' reluctance to pursue subjects like Maths and Science was that girls perceive these subjects as belonging to the masculine domain. Koehler and Fennema (as cited in Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997) argued that girls themselves also played a role in their inability to compete academically against boys on the same level by taking a back seat in class discussions in order not to offend boys with 'sharp'² answers.

On a slightly different note, and not directly related to my research topic in reviewing the literature, I became aware of arguments about single-sex versus coeducational schools. The American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (1998) documented that single-sex schooling benefits to a large extent both female and male learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, it appears that male learners tend to benefit more from coeducational schools (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1998:1). According to Schackleton (2004), girls are better able to excel in Maths and Science when enrolled in girls-only schools. Haag (2000) was of the opinion that girls in single-sex settings are more successful with regard to academic and athletic performance than their peers in coeducational settings. Female learners who embrace higher educational aspirations are more likely to pursue further studies and hold less stereotypical perceptions of gender roles (Haag, 2000:4).

As my own study will show, Haag's claim is supported by Vicky and Amy who are

² 'Sharp' as I used it in my study means intelligent answers provided by girls that would make boys feel inferior to their female counterparts.

academically much stronger than the other four girls, they aspired to become an engineer or doctor and; accountant or financial manager respectively.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The literature reported in the preceding sections clearly indicates that the education of the African girl is still hampered by a number of gender inequity factors. However, constraints such as curriculum design and delivery, teachers' and parental attitudes, the impact of HIV/AIDS and, teenage pregnancy, that seem to hinder girls' access to education do not *necessarily* prevent them from performing on an equal basis, or even surpassing, boys once they are enrolled. In my own research, I draw on the categories identified via the literature in the design of my own research. My research is geared towards discovering how closely my own group of Namibian girls confirms these findings.

In Namibia there has been a very explicit legislative drive towards gender equity. This has informed curriculum planning decisions, and – in principle, therefore – there is nothing to actually *prevent* girls from taking an equal place alongside boys in, for example, Namibia's Maths and Science classrooms. I wanted to explore, therefore, what *are* some of the factors – on the ground – that may serve to compromise Namibian girls' ability to actualize such ideas.

The literature also suggests that girls tend to take the lead regarding academic performance, yet still seem to come off second best in terms of opportunities in the job market. In Namibia girls believe that boys perform academically better than them (Kasanda et al., 1996). Could this be a contributory factor in why many girls seem to suffer from a lower self-esteem than boys? Is this perhaps why girls still view themselves as not good enough to choose subjects like Maths and Science although timetabling is no longer a stumbling block for those female learners wishing to pursue these subjects? These are the questions that frame my investigation when I explore to what extent my participants fit this 'conventional' profile.

In this chapter, I have tried to provide a framework for my own study. Having reviewed the literature, I believe I have a clearer sense of some of the factors which cause girls to under-perform in their secondary phase of education. It became clear, for example, how important a teacher's role can be in the formation of low self-expectations and consequently, low academic aspirations.

My hope for my study is that it may contribute - in however small a way - to helping teenage girls towards a better understanding of the various social pressures that they have to face, and how they might resist these. In the following chapter, I outline the methodology I used in my research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the framework for my research design. I look at aspects of site selection and describe the context in which data was collected. A discussion of the rationale for selecting my sample population for the study is included. The research techniques I used in data collection and analysis are also addressed, as are issues of validity and reliability (the most important being the trustworthiness of my interpretations of the data obtained). I then give attention to my data analysis procedures, describing the steps I took in ‘making meaning’ out of the raw data. Finally, I briefly consider some of the limitations and difficulties I encountered as my research progressed.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Gall, Borg and Gall point out that “your description of your research design should be such that the reader has a clear, complete picture of what you did in the process of conducting the study” (1996:71). They argue however, that this is a “difficult goal to accomplish because the researcher is close to the study and may not see clearly all that needs to be made explicit” (Gall et al., 1996:71).

When conducting research, one needs to operate within a theoretical framework. Such a framework assists in the interpretation, and thence explanation, of a set of phenomena. I chose to use an interpretive framework to guide this study. An interpretive approach allows the researcher to apply reflective interpretation of the phenomenon (Gall et al., 1996). My study explores how a selected group of Namibian teenage girls construct meaning of their lived experiences and how an analysis of their perceptions can help teachers understand their aspirations. Erickson defines interpretive research as the study of the immediate and local meanings of social actions for the actors involved in them (as cited in Gall et al., 1996). Gall et al. (1996:29) argue that interpretive research is consistent with qualitative research. An interpretive approach provides opportunities for looking more deeply into the world of

participants' experiences and actions (Cantrell, 1993). My emphasis throughout is on gathering qualitative data.

In order to describe what I understand as a qualitative approach, I draw on the following key concepts identified by Denzin and Lincoln (2003:5):

- it studies cases;
- it is multi-method in its focus;
- it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter; and,
- it observes things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the *meanings* people bring to them.

Two outstanding advantages of qualitative research are, firstly, that it allows the researcher to study selected cases in depth and detail. Secondly, that the researcher can approach fieldwork without the constraint of predetermined categories of analysis, and so can add value to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990:13). One of the disadvantages of qualitative research however, is that it typically involves a small number of people and cases. It is therefore not generalisable to any great extent.

I used a case study approach since it “provides unique examples of real people in real situations” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000:181). Case studies enable a researcher to “penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis” they involve “the study of an instance in action” (Cohen et al., 2000:181). In this case study, I focus on the educational aspirations of high school female learners.

Stenhouse claimed that the purpose of the research in a case study in the context of education is to enhance educational practice, and hence the future of children (as cited in Bassey, 1999:79). Because my study is motivated by this desire, I hope it will in some way contribute to the educational authorities making gender equality a reality in Namibian schools. I also hope that it may help to sensitise teenage female learners about their educational rights. Cohen et al. suggest that the aim of case studies is to show “what it is like to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality of participants' ... thoughts about and feelings for, a situation” (2000:182). The researcher is able to view a situation through the eyes of participants.

Case studies are seen to have a number of advantages and disadvantages. Nisbet and Watts argued that case studies are regarded as efficient as they could be easily understood by (are accessible to) a wide audience. A single researcher can undertake them without needing a full research team; and they are strong on reality. On the downside, however, the results of case studies are typically not generalisable (except insofar as other readers or researchers may perhaps see parallels with their own research); and in addition, they are not easily open to cross-checking. It may therefore, be difficult to check for biased or personal and subjective interpretations (Nisbet & Watts, as cited in Cohen et al., 2000:184).

I have attempted to solve the problem of my case study being overly personal and subjective by requesting my respondents not to include myself as an example in their responses. I also asked them not to reveal the identities of teachers they used as examples. With regard to the problem of cross-checking, I align myself with Measor's view that "after spending eighteen months with a group of pupils, I did have a sense of what was accurate, the data were based on a well-established relationship" (as quoted in Burgess, 1985:74).

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Two critical issues in a case study are firstly, that of identifying appropriate sites, and secondly obtaining permission from stakeholders to work in these sites. In my next section I introduce the site (or context) within which I obtained my data.

3.3 SITE SELECTION

The research was conducted at the school where I work as a teacher. I made this choice because both the context and the learners are familiar to me. This guaranteed me access to the participants in their own natural environment [see Appendix A]. It may also grant one's participants a sense of belonging and an at-home kind of feeling.

The fact that I am a teacher at the school where I carried out my research, made it easy for me to obtain permission from the headmaster to conduct my research at the institution [see Appendix B]. After I had selected my participants, I sent a letter to their parents requesting their permission to use their children in my research study [see Appendix C].

~~The~~ The purpose of the research and what it entailed was explained to the parents and learners concerned. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in order to comply

with ethical practices. Both parents' and learners' permission was sought to record the interviews on tape [see Appendix D]. It is important that a case study is carried out "within an ethic of respect for persons" (Bassey, 1999:58). Pseudonyms were used to hide participants' identity. None of the parents raised objections to my request.

The structure of the sample is a central feature of most research. The sampling technique I used in this study is discussed in the following section.

3.4 SAMPLE

A sample is typically a sub-set used for getting information about a larger group or about the whole population in a certain context. The sample in this study was selected using convenience sampling. It was convenient as my participants are situated where I work. Although Gall et al. (1996:229) suggest that a sample might be constructed in such a way as to permit generalizations; in this study the sample probably will not have this characteristic.

My sample comprised six Grade Ten female learners. I have known these participants for almost three years and thought it would be easy for us to communicate spontaneously with each other. There were six Grade Ten classes in the school where the research was conducted. From each class I identified a group of high, average and low performers. The six respondents included in my sample were chosen by randomly taking a high performer from the first Grade Ten class, an average performer from the second Grade Ten class, and a low performer from the third Grade Ten class and so on. I chose high and low achievers as the girls in the two categories might have different perceptions and aspirations. The selection was based on the participants' class marks and exam marks.

In the next section I present an explanation of the research strategy used to collect the data.

3.5 RESEARCH STRATEGY

Bassey (1999) claimed that case study research is not bounded by particular research instruments. He encouraged "researchers to be creative and adventurous in their choice of data collection methods" (1999:69), and to choose those methods of data collection with

which they are most comfortable. I used ^{Mixed} multiple methods of data collection such as individual interviews, questionnaires and a focus group interview.

The main research technique that I used to gather my data was semi-structured interviews [see Appendix E]. Semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to pose a series of structured questions and then probe more deeply with open-ended questions in search of additional insight (Gall et al., 1996). In one instance, I was forced to convert my interview questions into questionnaire format [see Appendix F] after one of my six respondents became mute when I posed the first question to her. Here was an instance where I was proven wrong in my assumption that it would be easier for all my respondents to communicate spontaneously with me as they had known me for quite some time. The claim made by Gall et al. that a researcher “might begin a case study with one method of data collection and gradually shift to, or add, other methods” (1996:557) supports my experience with regard to this particular respondent.

A valuable lesson I learned from this experience is that dealing with young people in unequal power relationships can negate the whole value of an interview. The request of this particular respondent to write down her responses obviously made it more difficult for me to probe her responses in depth.

I compiled a second questionnaire [see Appendix G] for all the respondents in order to incorporate areas that I did not cover in my interviews. Time constraints made it impossible to conduct a second set of interviews. As the questionnaires reduced my chances to prompt and probe further, I decided to also conduct a focus group interview [see Appendix H]. Unfortunately I could use only four of the participants in my focus group interview, as the other two girls were absent from school on the day I conducted the interview.

As individual interviews were my core method of data collection, I explain what I understand by the term ‘interviews’ and how they were conducted.

3.5.1 Interviews

An interview is a powerful tool to collect data. It allows the researcher time to probe deeply in order to “elicit more information” (Klaas, 2005:1). Gillham describes an interview as a

“conversation where ... the interviewer is seeking responses for a particular purpose from the ... interviewee” (2000:1).

I used in-depth semi-structured interviews. It was difficult to decide what questions to ask in order to be sure of getting relevant results. I compiled an interview schedule with a combination of structured and open-ended questions. Most of my questions required extended responses with prompts and probes. As Bailey notes, open-ended questions give respondents the opportunity to give their own responses; answers which are “self-expressive” (as cited in Sanders & Pinhey, 1983:106).

The interviews were carried out on a one-on-one basis. I decided that this was best, because individual interviews reduce the risk of respondents being influenced by the responses of others in the group. Interviews can make it possible to obtain information that the individual probably would not reveal through other methods. Interviews however also have limitations. For example, questions may be biased.

Although interviews provide valuable data, they are quite susceptible to bias. Therefore, the interview guide and procedures should be given a pilot test to ensure that they will yield reasonably unbiased data.

(Gall et al., 1996:316)

In order to eliminate the risk of posing questions with a bias towards the kinds of responses I wanted, I conducted a pilot interview with a Grade Eleven girl [see Appendix I]. I chose this particular girl for my pilot because she is confident and spontaneous and had completed her Grade Ten the previous year. Using her for pre-testing the items helped me identify those questions that were ambiguous, giving me a chance to revise them appropriately. Gillham believes that trialing one’s questions is “concerned with getting the *questions* right rather than getting the *interview* right” (2000:53). That is exactly what I attempted to do.

Several other lessons were learned from the pilot process. Although we had reached consensus about a date, time and venue for the pilot interview we had to postpone it on several occasions as the interviewee had other obligations to fulfil. And then when we eventually did the interview, I forgot to switch on the tape recorder. It was quite an embarrassing experience for me. I had to return to her in order to explain what happened. Fortunately she agreed to be interviewed again on that same day. She even told me that she

noticed I did not switch on the tape recorder, but just thought that it was what I wanted. I decided I would also make additional notes as back-up in the event of tape failure.

In order to conduct my actual interviews a date, time and venue were agreed upon with my six respondents. They all preferred that the interviews should take place in my classroom after normal school hours. Although interviews were already scheduled for the first term of the academic year, I only managed to complete the remaining five during the second term. I found during the interviews that the respondents did not always understand a question, but I managed to bring them back on track with paraphrasing and further probing. All the interviews were audio-taped and I transcribed them later.

3.5.2 Questionnaires ✓

A questionnaire is a set of written questions used to collect data from respondents. Since my questionnaires mainly concentrated on open-ended questions, the participants were not bound to specific answers; instead they were invited to write their own narratives.

If a researcher's set of questions is well constructed, fairly valid data may be collected in a simple, cheap and timely way (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998:170). Nevertheless, questionnaires provide little opportunity for further probing of responses and little or no opportunity for respondents to clarify questions they are not certain of, or to ask questions of their own. In order to limit this problem I went back to the respondents with a few additional questions. I gave the respondents sufficient time to complete the questionnaires at their leisure.

3.5.3 Focus group interviews ✕

The purpose of doing a focus group interview is to "understand what people experience and perceive about the focus of inquiry, through a process that is open and emergent" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:103). Krueger and Morgan (as cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) suggest it is best that a focus group interview be conducted with not less than four participants. My group interview comprised four girls. In a focus group interview, participants can listen to one another's responses. This "may spark new insights or help them develop their ideas more clearly" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:104).

In my case, I wanted to find out what the participants think or feel about certain aspects of my research. For example, I draw on just one question related to my research: whether the respondents think teenage pregnancy would have an influence on girls' educational performance. Each girl shared her perceptions and experiences about teenage pregnancy with the group. This allowed me a better insight into what the respondents think and know about teenage pregnancy.

Despite the fact that the girls could share their experiences and feelings with each other, one of the respondents told me afterwards that she did not feel sufficiently comfortable to talk in the presence of the others. But it did not appear to me that this particular respondent struggled to give her input. I think her 'voice' came out as much as the other respondents'.

Issues of validity and reliability are essential elements in effective research. They are discussed in the following section.

3.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In qualitative data "validity might be addressed through the ... depth, richness and scope of the data achieved" (Cohen et al., 2000:105). Triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher might also add to trustworthiness of data (Cohen et al., 2000:105). Triangulation allows the cross-checking of data by using multiple data collection methods so as to increase the validity of research findings.

A number of validity checks were done in an attempt to strengthen the reliability of my data. In the first instance, I assured participants that their identities would not be revealed and that they could trust me to treat their responses with respect. I also gave each of them a transcript of their individual interview so that they could verify that I had transcribed their narrative accurately. I told them that they could add to or amend anything if it worried them.

I also compiled a case record that included all the consent forms, documents, audio-taped cassettes, interview transcripts and questionnaires used to write up my research.

Various approaches can be used to analyse case study data. The next section sheds more light on the approach I used in my analyses.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

I commenced my data analysis process on the day I conducted my first interview (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). I employed “interpretational analysis” (Gall et al., 1996:562) to guide me in the process of data analysis. This, according to Gall et al. “is the process of examining case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied” (1996:562).

I used four levels of data analysis. Firstly, I transcribed my data in verbatim form. Secondly, I printed copies of the transcripts and questionnaire responses and after thoroughly reading them I cut out each participant’s individual responses in order to paste all of them under the respective questions. Thirdly, I went back to my literature review and organised my analysis according to themes emerging from my literature thus, I extended the analysis to examine the findings in consideration of existing literature and theory. Fourthly, I grouped related codes and compared the data within each category, looking for variations and comparisons.

As all research studies have limitations, in the following section I identify weaknesses of my research.

3.8 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Limitations are weaknesses of the research study “beyond the control of the researcher that may place restrictions on the conclusions of the study” (Best & Kahn, 2006:39). Firstly, this research does not allow the generalisation of findings as my sample size was small. The idea of generalisability sits uneasily with interpretive research. The perceptions and views of my participants cannot be seen as applying to all the girls in that particular group, but to the individual participants only.

Secondly, the period of time available to complete the study was very limited, which was compounded by the fact that I have job and family responsibilities. Thirdly, I did not have a chance to build as good a rapport with my participants outside the classroom as I would have liked. We live in dispersed suburbs, and the girls had to attend to schoolwork as well as household activities after school rather than spending time with me.

Fourthly, the fact that one respondent preferred a questionnaire to an interview limited my opportunities to really prompt and probe more deeply in her case.

Fifthly, as one of the respondents informed me, after the focus group interview had been conducted, that she was not very comfortable talking in front of her peers, she might have withheld some important information regarding certain questions.

Finally, my findings face the possible threat that the participants may have given responses only to please me. I taught them for three consecutive years. Consequently, it is possible that their true feelings or perceptions may not have surfaced as fully as I might have hoped.

3.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have provided a route map of my research design, and of the methods used in order to gather relevant data of the topic under investigation. I have described the research orientation in which I located my study (an interpretive framework), and attempted to justify my choice of a case study as an appropriate method within the interpretive orientation.

I have also illuminated the method of sampling I applied, as well as the site selection and the ethical standards I followed. The research techniques used in this study – individual interviews, questionnaires and focus group interview – were described, and their strengths and weaknesses noted. I reflected briefly on issues of trustworthiness and validity, and explained the data analysis procedures that I followed as I attempted to make sense of my data. Finally, some of the research limitations were noted. In the next chapter, I present the data I obtained, together with an analysis thereof.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND FIRST LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As noted in my methodology chapter, my data derive mainly from three methods – individual interviews, questionnaires and a focus group interview to obtain data from and about the girls who participated in my study. Thereby providing a measure of triangulation, and so enhancing the likelihood of validity. The first source is interview data obtained from five Grade Ten female learners, plus data from a questionnaire issued to one of the girls at her request. The second source is questionnaire data gathered from all six participants. The third source is data collected from a focus group interview that I conducted with four of the participants.

Having scrutinised the data from the interviews and questionnaires, I chose the following categories around which to organise my information:

- The girls' claims about their personal experiences in school; ✓
- Factors which the girls believe have influenced their educational aspirations; ✓
- The influence of peers on girls' educational aspirations; ✓
- The girls' career dreams relative to their educational performance; ✓
- The girls' self-perceptions when they compare themselves to boys; ✓
- The challenges the girls see themselves having to face. ✓

Although I undertake a preliminary level of analysis of my data in this chapter, a more detailed analysis is presented in Chapter Five.

Before explaining these themes, however, let me provide some background information on the girls who contributed to my study.

4.2 BACKGROUND OF GIRLS INTERVIEWED

This information was obtained via the questionnaires. See Table 2 below.

Table 2: Some background information on participants.

Background	Fiona	Amy	Vicky	Essie	Joan	Veve
Age	17	16	16	18	15	16
Home language	Damara	Herero	Wambo	Afrikaans	Wambo	Herero
With whom do you live?	Parents Single (Mother)	Guardian (Parents lived on farm)	Parents	Guardian (Mother lived in a different town and father abroad)	Parents	Parents
Occupation:	Supervisor	Financial Accountant	Father: Driver	Secretary	Father: Soldier Mother: Cleaner	Father: Tour guide Mother: Clerk
Employer	Chain retailer	Courier service	Parastatal	Health Centre	State	Tourism industry
Transport to school	Taxi	By foot	Taxi	By foot	By foot	Private vehicle
Educational resources at home	TV	TV Novels	TV Encyclopaedias	TV Computer	TV Computer	TV Sister's Law books
Academic performance (girls' perceptions)	50-60%	75-90%	75-90%	50-60%	50-60%	50-60%
Future Vocational aspirations	Fashion Designer	Financial Accountant	Engineer/ Medical doctor	Air Hostess/ Bank clerk	Journalist	Financial Accountant

- Grade (Ten) average: 42%

Social class is a difficult concept to pin down. Based on some of the background information provided in the table above by my participants, however, I would argue that these girls came from a working class, or lower middle class, background. I say this because although four of

the girls said they lived with their parents, they (the parents) did not have well-paid jobs and these girls went to school either by foot or by taxi except for Vee who went to school in a private vehicle. The girls who lived with their guardians also went to school by foot. The reason for this is most likely one of economy or proximity to the school. A further indicator is that the parents and/or guardians could not afford additional learning materials in the form of home libraries that could help these girls with school projects. Regarding the way the girls perceived their academic performance, I agree with their self-assessments since I taught them. It indeed mirrors their actual performance in class so these grades they believed themselves to have obtained are very realistic.

4.3 THE GIRLS' CLAIMS ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL

The data for this section were obtained from the individual interviews I held with five of the six girls and from the questionnaires that all the girls completed. On the premise that one's educational experiences may contribute to one's aspirations and accomplishments in life, I asked the girls to tell me about their personal experiences in school. All six girls seem to enjoy school. However, some of them also indicated that they did have some concerns about school. Table 3 below captures the reasons the girls gave for liking school.

Table 3: Reasons why participants liked being in school.

	REASONS
Fiona	<i>"The best thing of being in school is you get to study and you upgrade your knowledge ... You get more clever".</i>
Amy	<i>"So far my experiences of school have been outstanding ... school is the only thing that can make my future bright ... because I find it very nice to spend my time for useful things ... I benefit from school because I gain knowledge and even know things I never knew before. Like I didn't know that water also go back to the atmosphere in the process of evaporation and I never knew that frogs also suffer from high blood pressure".</i>
Vicky	<i>"I enjoy school ... and most of the time I don't really like spending time at home. It's very boring ... most of my friends are also at school and at school I learn more than being at home. The best being in school is education because education is the key to success".</i>
Essie	<i>"Well, I've had a lot of experiences so far; I've learned new things ... maybe I can find new ways to improve life ... I can become a doctor; I can become a scientist maybe; I can cure people and things like that".</i>
Joan	<i>"Very well – good. I never experienced any problems during subjects".</i>

As the girls' comments from the table show, four of the participants, Fiona, Amy, Vicky and Essie genuinely believed that education could help them to achieve something worthwhile in their future life.

Despite the fact that the girls liked being at school, some of them complained about certain things at school. Two of the participants, Fiona and Essie, regarded school as being very tough as the work got harder as they progressed from one grade to the next. Fiona stated, *"the work ... gets a little bit harder as the classes get higher"*. Essie also felt that the work was too much, but could cope with most of it barring two subjects, Mathematics and History. She said: *"some subjects ... get too much ... History and Maths"*. Essie seemed to be academically weaker than her peers perhaps because she is the eldest and also one of the four girls who rated her academic performance between 50-60%, which is an average performance (see Table 2, Chapter Four).

Vicky commented *"I don't like this school. It's just not my type ... it's just not that type of school that I like ... there's a lot of bunkers; learners don't have respect and so on. I just wanna go to a better school ... it must lead like to ... Christianity"*. I found her response intriguing because it was not Vicky's first year at this particular school. She started Grade Eight two years previously at the institution. Bearing in mind Vicky's background (see Table 2), her attitude towards the school might originate from the possibility that her parents could not afford to enrol her in a previously-missionary school (now a private school).

Notwithstanding the fact that the girls experienced problems at school, these problems seemed minor compared to the girls' perceptions of how school might help them in future life.

4.4 FACTORS WHICH THE GIRLS BELIEVE HAVE INFLUENCED THEIR EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

I asked the girls to identify what factors might have a possible influence on their educational performance, either positively or negatively. Five key factors were identified:

- Parents;
- Teachers;

- Some curriculum issues with special regard to the girls' favourite subjects, least favourite subjects and the ways in which the girls believed they were portrayed in their various subjects' textbooks;
- The threat of HIV/AIDS;
- The risk of teenage pregnancy

4.4.1 Parents' influence on academic performance and aspirations

Five of the participants, Fiona, Amy, Vicky, Essie and Joan, stated that their parents had the greatest influence on their academic performance. They saw this encouragement as a sign of love and a desire for them to be successful in life.

Fiona's mother - a single parent - is her greatest inspiration to pursuing her studies. Fiona also referred to certain circumstances in life that inspired her to study harder: *"I see the way children live in life. Those who don't have ... uhm ... being educated or dropped out of school and I see they live in a very hard way. They haven't got studies; they're out on the streets, begging for money and stuff like that and that inspires me to work harder"*.

Joan's motivation to perform well in school is due also to her parents, both of whom completed their studies and now work at successful companies. Although Amy said that her parents sometimes motivated her to study hard, she felt that her educational performance is to a large extent due to her own *"co-operation and responsibility"*. She gave the following reason for being so committed to her studies: *"I want to fulfil my dreams of becoming someone in the future with a position somewhere and I also want to prove to myself how bright I am"*.

Essie felt that her parents inspire her a lot as they want her to reach her goals in life. Vee also said that her parents inspire her to perform well at school, but they do *"not really"* motivate her as *"they are too busy"*.

The girls also suggested ways in which they would have liked their parents to help them more with the challenges they faced as teenage girls. In Table 4 below I present the girls' suggestions on how their parents could have helped them more with the challenges they faced.

Table 4: Ways in which the girls believed their parents could have helped them with their challenges.

Name	Comment about parent
Fiona	<i>"... to inspire you and to support you in school ... if there's maybe a parent's meeting, they should be there at all times and ... helping you with your school work or if you come from school... open your school books and ask if you understand this. They should also try helping you with your studies"</i> .
Amy	<i>"I think ... parents can help me more by encouraging, motivating and advising me ... parents have to encourage our rights so that we can get up for our rights"</i> .
Vicky	<i>"... my parents they encourage me and they tell me that I must have respect and self-confidence"</i> .
Essie	<i>"I think they would have to be more ... they don't always spend time with me and I think I need a person that will ... like a tutor who will tutor me in all my subjects; just to be sure. So, I think I need more attention from the parents' side ... they would have to try to help me"</i> .
Joan	<i>"They can listen to our opinions and to what we have to say to them so that maybe they can also help us or tell us more about the challenges we are facing ... or maybe also part of the way in which they grew up ... how they were taught by our grandparents that girls like to be told all things about boys. They can talk to me often or give me advice like, not to hang out with the wrong friends or when I'm pressured I should learn to say no to things which I know are wrong"</i> .
Vee	<i>"By being open and by listening to what you want ... it should not always be about what they want ... I think they should also give you your freedom in a way. I think that they should talk about their own experiences and the mistakes they made in the past so that I, as a teenager, can avoid making the same mistakes. They should allow you to go out, they should allow you like ... to be open, they should allow you to ... maybe to introduce your boyfriend to them so that they can know maybe where you are or with what type of people you hang out with ..."</i> .

The girls clearly expected their parents to get more involved in their education in general. They would have highly valued the encouragement, support, openness, advice and attention of their parents with regard to the challenges they faced as teenagers.

4.4.2 Influence of teachers' attitudes on educational aspirations

Essie noted that her teachers played a contributing role in her academic performance because they encouraged her to try her best at school. She found so much encouragement from her teachers surprising, because she said: *"it's really surprising cause a lot of teachers ... they just think like they just have to do ... they give you the work and you have to do it and it's bad about it ..."*. She felt that although her teachers encouraged her to study harder not all of them prepared properly for lessons. They just gave them a topic and expected the learners to do it on their own. She told me that she does not understand Mathematics that well. She blamed the teacher, noting: *"the teacher who teaches us ... she doesn't explain the things that well to us ... every time I ask her to explain this to me she has another class"*. Vicky also

blamed her teacher for her not understanding Geography that well. She said: *"the teacher is also boring. Whenever I try to ask her something she won't answer me; she's mean"*.

Like her two peers, Vee too blamed the teachers for her not being able to understand some of her subjects. In her case these were French and Life Science. Vee made the following comment about Life Science: *"Because the teachers are irritating. It's just a lot of things that you have to do ... I mean like the Life Science teacher ... she teaches Biology so she teaches in high English level that we don't understand"*. And she had the following to say about French: *"... when we tell the teacher that we don't understand she gets angry and then she ... she's so aggressive. She says: "What don't you understand ... what don't you understand? ... and she speaks in French"*.

The girls also commented on how the teachers treated male and female learners in the classroom. Fiona and Vicky thought that teachers treat both male and female learners equally. However, Fiona said that in general, girls would participate more in class than the boys. According to her, boys *"do not respond to the teachers ... girls respond more to the teachers. The girls are talking to the teachers very openly, answer to them and stuff like that"*. She said that she felt it was easier for boys to respond to male teachers and easier for girls to respond to female teachers.

Amy felt that some of the male teachers responded differently to female learners. Her comment was: *"There are just some with attitude and I don't like or trust some of the male teachers"*. Joan stated that some of the male and female teachers preferred to work with male learners. She argued as follows:

"maybe some teachers don't wanna put boys and girls at the same level or some teachers think that boys are better than girls and other teachers ... only maybe one would... see that girls are better than boys in certain subjects".

Joan expressed the view that female teachers preferred to work with boys because *"boys are more active and respond more quickly than girls"*. She said that the Accounting teacher (male) also preferred to work with boys because *"he knows that males are better in Accounting than girls ... that's why he mostly concentrates on boys"*.

Vee thought female teachers treated boys and girls equally, but like Amy and Joan, she felt that male teachers concentrated more on male learners. She gave the following example:

“In the Accounting class it’s like ... the teacher decides that ... let me explain to the Oshivambo guys in Oshivambo and then us who don’t understand anything ...”

Essie thought that female teachers “are being nicer to girls than to boys”, but boys would be liked if they “achieve or go far in life”. She said that female teachers generally treated both boys and girls equally.

The participants also reported on the ways in which they thought their teachers could have helped them more with their challenges as teenage girls. See Table 5 below.

Table 5: Ways in which the girls believed their teachers could have helped them with their challenges.

Name	Comment about teacher
Fiona	<i>“They should be more open with their learners and they should talk in an open way. They should not be very strict with them ... they should also try to know the child more ... what they don’t like and what they like cause maybe the child does have a hearing problem in class and they just talk and the child can’t hear ... the teacher is just standing there in front talking soft and the child is having a problem, so the teacher must know the child more better”.</i>
Amy	<i>“I think teachers ... can help me more by encouraging, motivating and advising me. Teachers ... have to encourage our rights so that we can get up for our rights”.</i>
Vicky	<i>“By encouraging me like, the teachers educated me to have more skills ...”.</i>
Essie	<i>“... if they start to help me more in class ... to ask, well not just actually me, but all the kids in the class, if they really understand because some children ... they get shy and think that the rest of the class would think they dumb if they put up their hands and then the teacher can just say that he or she can meet that teacher after school or after that period if the teacher doesn’t have a class to try to help the learners ... to talk to them more about life experiences. I would actually see teachers like ... more like trying to be strict. The teacher has to be friendlier and try to explain things in the correct way so that the whole class would understand”.</i>
Joan	<i>“They can give us advice about our challenges. They can tell us to go and look for more information about peer pressure or drug abuse or they can tell us to work hard”.</i>
Vee	<i>“By talking about things that people don’t want to talk about like, pregnancies, peer pressure, HIV. I seriously think there is a need because if they don’t tell us ... maybe some of our parents live still in the old days and they think it’s wrong to talk about that then the teachers will be there to tell us so that we can prepare ourselves for a better future. It’s very important for teachers to talk about teenage pregnancies because then they will tell teenagers not to have sex or to use a condom or to go for injections to avoid unwanted pregnancies. I mean, you will know it’s wrong, but then you just do it because nobody has ever told you not to do it and then maybe when you are told not to do it, you won’t do it”.</i>

Teachers, they argued, should also have been willing to advise them on, among others, life experiences such as teenage pregnancy, the use of contraceptives, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS.

4.4.3 The curriculum

I found close agreement between all research participants regarding certain curriculum issues. I have divided this section into three sub-themes in order to highlight the girls' opinions regarding firstly, their favourite school subjects; secondly, their least favourite school subjects; and thirdly, their perceptions of the way girls are portrayed in the textbooks these girls use in their various school subjects.

Favourite subjects

When I analysed this particular aspect of my data *across* all six participants, their preference for the commercial subjects showed up very clearly. See Table 6 below.

Table 6: Subjects the girls liked most.

	Business Management	Accounting	English	German	Maths	History
Fiona	√		√	√		
Amy		√			√	
Vicky	√	√	√	√	√	√
Essie	√	√				
Joan	√		√			
Vee	√	√				

Fiona stated that her favourite subjects at school were Business Management and German while Joan said that her favourite subjects were Business Management and English. Fiona liked these particular two subjects because she believed that they may help her one day in the future to achieve something in life. She claimed that she could score eighteen out of twenty in written assessment tests for Business Management and German. She explained as follows:
... I really want to try very hard in these subjects because you can do something great in life

with them ... I think so. You can become a businesswoman; you can go work at a bank and stuff like that.

Joan said that she liked Business Management and English because she found these subjects interesting and understood them very well. She claimed she could score fourteen and even more out of twenty in assessment tests in these two subjects. It is interesting to note that Fiona and Joan believed they could score 90% and 70% in the subjects they claimed to like most.

Amy said that she liked Accounting and Mathematics very much. She felt that she was very good at these two subjects, perhaps because: *"I am a person who likes to work with numbers ... I don't forget quickly methods of working out numbers"*. Both Essie and Vee stated that they liked Accounting and Business Management. Essie said: *"I understand Business and Accounting more than I do with the other subjects ... cause if I do it, it like gives me energy ... it's more ... I like doing it"*. She also claimed that she is not always good at these subjects, but sometimes she is surprised by her results in Accounting, as she said: *"it sometimes surprises me, especially in Accounting cause last time I didn't learn for Accounting, I only revised it and then when the exams came ... I got good marks"*.

Vee too identified Accounting and Business Management as her favourite subjects. She said that for her it was easy to study Business Management: *"Business ... it's easy to study ... once you read it the things are already in here [pointing to her head] ... you don't have to memorise anything"*. She claimed that she could score fifteen out of twenty for a Business Management test if she studied and ten out of twenty if she did not study. She felt that she was perhaps just good at English, and - although Accounting is *"just terrible"*, it was easy to understand provided you paid attention in the class. As it was, although she seldom obtained more than six out of twenty when she wrote an Accounting test, she had recently got fifteen out of twenty for one such test because she tried her best to concentrate in the Accounting class. She noted: *... at least I got fifteen in the last test, because I understood it. I was giving my whole attention when the teacher was teaching"*.

Vicky said that she liked all the subjects except Geography, even though she could score nineteen out of twenty-five when she wrote a Geography test. It is worth noting that Vicky achieved good marks in a Geography test even though she said she did not really enjoy the

subject. She said that she was not very good at all the subjects she liked, but she was really good at Business Management, Mathematics and History.

Least favourite subjects

Table 7 shows the girls' views on the subjects they liked least.

Table 7: Subjects the girls liked least.

	Maths	History	Geography	Accounting	French	Life Science
Fiona	√	√				
Amy		√	√			
Vicky			√			
Essie	√	√				
Joan	√			√		
Vee					√	√

Both Fiona and Essie stated that Mathematics and History were their least favourite subjects. The reasons Fiona gave for not liking Mathematics and History were: *“Mathematics are really ... I don't understand ... a little bit and History ... I don't know ... I don't think it's very important in life”*. Essie argued as follows: *“I don't understand Maths that well and History is a lot of work ... I have to memorise everything and when the paper comes it is like I go blank; I can't remember”*.

Unlike Amy, who liked Mathematics and Accounting, Joan disliked Mathematics and Accounting. She claimed that she could only manage to achieve eleven, maybe twelve, out of twenty-five when she wrote an assessment test for these two subjects. Joan thus scored poor grades in the subjects she claimed to like least.

Amy's least favourite subjects were History and Geography; and Vicky emphasised her antipathy also towards Geography. Vicky's dislike for Geography stemmed from the fact

that she found the subject boring, while Amy said that she is not very good at Geography and like Fiona, asserted that she regarded History as irrelevant:

“I am not that good in these subjects, because I just hate it to study these long sentences ... I also hate it to study about the past ... for me studying things from the past is useless. Both of these subjects are really tough for me and if it comes for me to choose the subjects I want, I will not try to choose one of them”.

Vee’s opinion on the subjects she disliked took a different direction from that of her peers’. She stated that she disliked French and Life Science. She also claimed that French and Life Science were the two subjects in which she scored her lowest marks. Whenever she wrote an assessment test for these subjects, she only managed to obtain between eight and ten out of twenty.

It would seem that in general the girls scored good grades in the subjects they liked most and poor grades in the subjects they liked least. Vicky seemed to be the only one who scored high grades even in a subject she did not like at all.

The girls’ views about their favourite and least favourite subjects formed an interesting link with their perceived vocational value. It seems they were realistic enough in their future vocational aspirations. I focus on career dreams and educational aspirations in greater detail in section 4.6.

Ways in which the girls believed they were portrayed in their various subjects’ textbooks

In Table 8 I have collated the girls’ perceptions of how their textbooks portrayed girls’ contribution to society. This feedback was obtained from the questionnaires that I had issued to all six participants, plus the focus group interview I conducted with four of the girls.

Table 8: Girls’ perceptions of how textbooks portrayed their contribution to society.

Do textbooks portray girls’ contribution to society in a positive way?			
	Yes	No	Comment
Amy	√		<i>“The textbooks have the information we need to succeed. Without this information us girls to the society we are nothing. Textbooks really educate us”.</i>

Vicky	√		<i>"Because it has more information how you can take care yourself as a lady, e.g. not falling pregnant and be someone in future and not like in old days depending on guys. It has positive information encouraging us to be successful ladies in future to depend on our own. In Physics ... sometimes in a positive ... sometimes in a negative way".</i>
Essie		√	<i>"... because it's like encouraging teen girls to use their sexuality to get somewhere in life. Life Science ... like at the back they show how the girl gets pregnant and they show diseases ... They always show how they get AIDS and then a girl and a boy ... mostly they show the girls ... I think mostly it shows that the girl ... she's always the problem ... she begins with the problem. It is negative, because the girl ... seems like she is spreading the diseases".</i>
Fiona	√		<i>"... because women show more interest and focus ... sometimes in Mathematics they use boys for instance, when picking up stuff like hard work ... they mostly show boys".</i>
Vee		√	<i>"... because most of the cartoons in the textbooks are mainly guys or pictures showing guys works and only a few cartoons are representing girls and the so-called jobs that are just for girls as guys say it".</i>
Joan		√	<i>"... because they sometimes don't show a full scale work or information they only focus mostly on boys. I think ... because they want to protect girls from types of diseases ... or maybe for us to abstain".</i>

Three of the participants, Amy, Vicky and Fiona felt that textbook information helped women become independent in life. By contrast, Vee and Joan argued that the textbooks they used continued to use boys as examples. Fiona to a certain extent shared this view. Essie felt strongly that textbooks exploited girls' sexuality. She also argued that textbook information is used to blame women for all sorts of problems. Consequently, textbooks could perhaps contribute to society having a negative image of women.

In the next section I discuss the impact of HIV/AIDS on girls' educational aspirations.

4.4.4 The influence of HIV/AIDS on the aspirations of female learners

The responses in this section were obtained from the focus group interview as well as the questionnaires issued to all six participants. One of the factors I identified as a possible hindrance to female learners achieving their future hopes and dreams was the threat of HIV/AIDS. This indeed seemed to have influenced the educational aspirations of these teenage girls. All of my participants felt that it seemed to be the responsibility of girls to take care of an HIV/AIDS patient in a family. They argued that generally women showed more concern than men and cared about the sick in a family. Joan, for example, reasoned as follows: *"sometimes you drop out of school to take care of the person ... the person might be*



the oldest child in the house ... and mostly in some traditions, the girl has to take care of the sick ...". Fiona also commented on the likelihood that girls would now use their time to look after the HIV/AIDS patient instead of concentrating on their schoolwork.

Essie raised an interesting point. She agreed with her five peers that it appeared to be the responsibility of girls to take care of an HIV/AIDS patient. However, she argued that provided all the family members lent a hand caring for such a patient it would not have such a detrimental effect on a girl's schooling. She said: *"I think it depends on the sort of family ... if they are supporting you during that period when that person is having HIV ... I don't think it will affect you much ... helping you to take care of the person and giving you time to study"*.

Vicky felt threatened by the possibility that her parents might contract the disease as she believed everyone was at risk. She said: *"If it's your parents ... you always have an image in mind that who will pay my school fees"*. It seemed she was afraid that such an occurrence would put a stop to her achieving her future hopes and dreams.

4.4.5 The influence of teenage pregnancy on girls' educational aspirations

The data I present in this section consists of responses from the focus group interview as well as questionnaire responses from all six participants. Statistics show that teenage pregnancy is a very real problem facing Namibian schoolgirls: teenage pregnancies make up 9% of all pregnancies in Namibia (Iiping & Lebeau, 2005). In the next section, I present the views of the participants regarding the influence pregnancy could have on a teenage girl's future hopes and dreams.

When asked about their views on the influence that teenage pregnancy would have on girls' educational aspirations, the participants came up with interesting responses, although it should be noted that none of these girls had themselves ever been pregnant.

All the participants argued that the girl should be held responsible when she falls pregnant. In addition, Amy felt that friends could also talk teenage girls into having sex with their partners as *"they take sex as a normal thing for every child growing"*. According to Amy, *"no girls will want to be left out, because they have to have a part of the growing group"*.

Clearly, for Amy, peer pressure seemed to weigh more heavily than educational aspirations for some girls.

Vee argued that girls should be aware of the consequences of unprotected sex. She said that *“no one is responsible but the girl herself because she should know if she has sex without a condom she will get pregnant or she’ll get HIV/AIDS”*. The participants acknowledged that such consequences would certainly interfere with female learners’ future hopes and dreams. Fiona believed that when a girl gets pregnant while at school, she would have to be more concerned about her baby’s wellbeing rather than focusing on her educational aspirations. Both Fiona and Amy felt that such a girl’s mother might not want to support her anymore, especially if the baby’s father denied fatherhood. All the girls felt strongly about the compromising effect pregnancy would have on their future prospects. I present their views in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Compromising effects of early pregnancy on girls’ future prospects.

	EFFECT
Amy	<i>“It destroy young generations’ careers and ... once a girl is pregnant her academic performance is also in a mess ... she may suffer alone with her baby as we know the majority of nowadays mans never want to accept their children. This girl will loose her education as she may not have money to go back to school”</i> .
Vicky	<i>“If you’re pregnant you won’t finish with your education and you might not achieve your dreams and hopes. You’re might have a simple job if you’re lucky”</i> .
Fiona	<i>“When these girl gets pregnant while she’s still in school, she will seriously stop her concentration on school work, she will definitely fail her tests assignments etc. She won’t have time to think straight or think about another thing besides the baby that she’s going to have”</i> .
Joan	<i>“... at the end of the day they can’t come back to school and will have to stay at home. This means that they won’t be able to achieve something at the end of the day”</i> .

All four girls agreed very strongly that teenage pregnancy would definitely have a detrimental effect on girls’ education.

Despite the negative effect early pregnancy could have on girls’ future prospects, Fiona, for example, speculated that there might be unexpected benefits for a girl who got pregnant while at school. A girl might be inspired to prove to the world that she could achieve her future hopes and dreams: *“And I also think it is a very good thing ... now she has the experience of being a parent and now she sees whether it’s hard and whether it’s easy for her life ... that*

she would work very hard to achieve something". Fiona believed that poverty could also indirectly contribute to teenage pregnancy. She explained how school girls were sometimes forced to turn to 'sugar daddies' for financial assistance, and by so doing risk getting pregnant:

"maybe you live at home ... where you live at home may force you to have a sugar daddy ... maybe you desire too much something and maybe your parents cannot afford, now you think about sugar daddies because sugar daddies have money ... everything you want".

The participants also commented on the current teenage pregnancy policy followed by government schools in Namibia. The policy states that a schoolgirl who becomes pregnant may not return to school within one year after she has given birth. The participants felt that if a schoolboy impregnated a girl, he too should be suspended from school for the same period of time as the girl. They argued that it was not fair towards the girl that the boy should continue his school career while she loses out on a whole academic year's work. They felt that the same rule should apply for both parents. Fiona, who had experience with a friend who had fallen pregnant, had much to say:

"I think both of them should drop out of school and the girl must also not come back while the boy is still out ... not back at school, because both of them were involved. Now he should also be at home ... taking care of the mother while she is having the baby for that whole year and then also they might ... come back again to school".

Peer pressure is seen as having a potentially major influence on learners' academic performance and therefore, aspirations. In the next section, I present the views of two of the girls regarding the influence that their peers might have had on their academic performance.

4.5 INFLUENCE OF PEERS ON EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Although much has been written about peer pressure, I found it surprising that the girls I worked with here made so little mention of their friends' influence in relation to academic matters. Vee and Vicky referred to their friends regarding this matter, but Vee was the one who *explicitly* saw her friends as her greatest source of inspiration for performing well at school. She remarked that her parents were too occupied with job obligations. She said that although her friends were her greatest inspiration, she was also aware of the fact that some of

them could negatively influence the will to perform well. She felt that *“if you choose the wrong friends they would interfere with your school work and then you won’t perform well”*. Vicky stated that her friends were one of the reasons why she enjoyed going to school. She also claimed that it was a challenge for her to compete with her friend for the highest possible grades (see section 4.7, Table 10).

In the next section, I report on the participants’ views about their career aspirations.

4.6 THE GIRLS’ CAREER DREAMS RELATIVE TO THEIR EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE

I asked the girls whether they thought their current educational performance would help them achieve their future vocational hopes and dreams. I posed this particular question to assess how realistic my participants were in their dreams about future employment opportunities. In Table 2, Chapter Four, the girls provided their perceived academic performance and vocational aspirations. The two top students, Vicky and Amy, who perceived their academic performance to be between 75 and 90%, seemed to have higher vocational aspirations than their four peers.

Vicky believed that she would be able to live out her vocational dreams one day because she had *“come to school to be in class and to learn ... just to be someone in future and ... not to depend on another person ...”*. She felt that learners who bunked classes regularly do not have any future dreams. She hoped to become a *“professional engineering technician or a doctor ...”* because she *“really love practical work”*. She believed that her faith and hard work would help her to achieve her vocational aspirations. Her friends, parents and teachers had also encouraged her to be positive about her future hopes and dreams. However, she said that financial constraints could prevent her from accomplishing her future educational and vocational aspirations. She intended to pursue further studies in South Africa *“because South Africa is more developed than Namibia when it comes to technology”*. She regarded further education as very important as it would help her to acquire more skills. She hoped to enrol for a course in Science.

Amy commented as follows:

"I do believe there is a relationship between my educational performance and what I hope to do as a career. Especially my outstanding performance in Mathematics, Accounting and Business Management is giving me a clue to my dream career ... My dream career is to become an Accountant ... In ten years time I would like to be a very responsible financial manager ... I will gain lots of benefits from becoming a financial manager. I will know other countries economics by exchange rates and will get a nice salary. I would also like to be a wonderful mother to two kids and I have to get married ..."

She believed that self-confidence and trust in self would help her to achieve her future vocational hopes and dreams. She said, *"self-confidence is the main factor that can make us to achieve our aspirations"*. She believed that if we compare ourselves with other people, it would hinder us in the achievement of our aspirations as *"this turns out to make us lose self-confidence that we use to have"*. She regarded further education essential:

"Yes, further education is needed in order for you to have the suitable qualification for the position you have. If you don't have all the qualification for the position there will be brought someone else with more qualification and this is a matter of technology. As long as technology is raising people need bright ideas therefore you will still study for the new technology. I will follow the study course that contains Accounting, Mathematics and Business Management in order for me to fulfill my dream career ..."

Fiona argued: *"if you get high grades in class then you know specific one day that you will achieve something. My dream career is ... producing my own clothes ... but I hope to get married one day"*. She identified a few things that would promote her chances to achieve her future vocational aspirations: *"if you are very responsible ... that can lead you to ... achieve your dreams ... I listen in class and I'm always punctual at school"*. She was, however, also realistic in her reasoning that something in life might prevent her from achieving her dream career. She felt that pregnancy while at school would prevent her from achieving her future hopes and dreams. She also claimed that she could not achieve her future vocational aspirations without her mother's support. She gave thought to an alternative job if something should prevent her from becoming a fashion designer. She said that she then would like to work in a bank as she *"liked working with money"*. She hoped also to further her studies in Germany because she wanted to learn to speak German fluently. She felt that mastering the language might help her one day to get a job in Germany if things failed to work out for her in Namibia. She wanted to enrol for a commerce course at the university as this would help her with *"the business ... can help me to run the company, to know how many employees I should get in my business and ... how to treat my suppliers"*.

Essie's views on whether her educational performance would help her to reach her vocational hopes and dreams were a little different:

"Well, I don't think it has been this good because ... what I actually just love to do is not the same ... I'm studying to be an Accountant, but I really want to be an Air Hostess. Well, my dream career ... I don't think I will achieve it one day, because I have chosen other subjects and not the subjects I need to fulfill my dream one day".

She felt that she had made a poor subject choice for her forthcoming Grade Eleven year, arguing that Business Studies, Accounting and Economics would not help her to achieve her dream of becoming an Air Hostess. She said that she should rather have chosen Geography, Mathematics and a foreign language, which would have made it easier for her to become an Air Hostess. She regarded hard work and good communication between her and her teachers as important determinants to achieve her dream career. She hoped to get to England within the next ten years; have her own house; be an Accountant or work in a bank; and, moreover; be self-supportive. In addition, she *"would hope to have kids ..."*, but not before settling down in a well-paid job. However, she felt that circumstances at home, such as a lack of money, would prevent her from fulfilling her future career dreams. She was also fearful about possibly failing Grade Ten because she knew that if learners failed this grade in Namibia, they were not be allowed to return to formal school unless they were still under fifteen years of age.

Essie made the following observation when I asked her if she regarded further studies as important:

"Well, actually it is important, but I don't think I want to study further, because ... it's like you don't finish school ... but if I want to become something in life or want to achieve more, I have to study ... when I'm finished with school, I want to go directly ... into a job. I don't want to ... like study, study, study because everyone at home has problems and everyone has to bring money in ... So, I think I would have to work than to study. If I could continue, it would be like ... to study more about computers, because modern days everyone uses computers, cell phones ...".

It was as if Essie was really grappling with her educational and vocational prospects. She did not really know what would be best for her in the future, but she regarded education as one of the priorities in life.

Joan had the following to say in relation to her educational performance and vocational aspirations:

"... my performance in this term was very good because in most of my subjects I got fifty percent and upwards which is a good step for me to go further ... journalism ... I think that I have all the characteristics needed to become one ... energetic and hard working ... talkative as well".

She felt that she would work very hard to obtain the standards required for journalism. She said that the encouragement she got from her parents and friends would also help her to make her dream career come true. In ten year's time she would like to be a professional journalist who had already been promoted to a higher level. However, she realised that there might be some obstacles in her way to accomplish her vocational aspirations. She realised that it would be impossible for her to accomplishing her dreams if she did not work hard enough to obtain the requirements for journalism. In addition, she argued that people who criticized her intended course of study might contribute towards her not being able to fulfill her dream career. She felt that she could opt for another course if journalism did not work out for her. She said: *"... if I decide that I wanna go for commerce I can take ... Maths and Accounting"*.

Vee said she wanted to become an accountant because *"it has a lot of pays"*. However, she did not think that her current academic performance would help her to achieve this dream: *"... I don't think that I'm doing well enough ... I don't think that I'm doing well because so far it's not good for myself ... I think that if I want to study in the commerce field, I have to put more effort or otherwise next year they will give me a subject that I don't want"*. She claimed that she would be able to achieve her dream career *"... by studying ... by understanding the subject ... by giving more attention ..."*. She would like to be enrolled for a Masters degree at the University of Namibia in the field of commerce in ten year's time. Furthermore, she hoped to get an *"... opportunity to also become a DJ there and have a great time"*. I found this response really interesting as boys are usually more interested in becoming a 'DJ'. However, she felt that peer pressure, boring teachers and bunking classes would prevent her from making this dream career a reality.

All six girls regarded hard work as a main determinant in making their dream careers a reality. With reference to the girls' perceived academic performance (see Table 2, Chapter

Four), I would therefore argue that five of these girls seemed to be rather optimistic in their vocational aspirations. These participants were quite sure that they would pursue further studies and become professionals who could actively contribute to society. Vee is the only one who seemed not to be very realistic in her vocational hopes and dreams if one considers her perceived academic performance. Nonetheless, she acknowledged the fact that her academic performance was not good enough to make her dream career a reality. Five of the six participants indicated that they would opt for a job in commerce. Vicky was the only one who wanted to be employed in the scientific field.

However, Amy and Essie agreed with Vicky that it was important to keep up with the latest technology to be able to compete in the contemporary job market. The girls identified early pregnancy, a lack of parental support, financial constraints, peer pressure, boring teachers, bunking classes, competition, irresponsibility towards school work, fear of failing Grade Ten and criticism of their career choices as factors which might prevent them from accomplishing their vocational aspirations.

In the next section, I report on how the girls viewed themselves in relation to their male counterparts.

4.7 THE GIRLS' SELF-PERCEPTIONS WHEN THEY COMPARE THEMSELVES TO BOYS

I wanted to know whether the girls thought that being a girl put them at a disadvantage in terms of reaching their dreams. Table 10 summarises the individual responses of the girls.

Table 10: Girls' views about their success in society in relations to boys.

Do you think that being a girl puts you at a disadvantage in terms of reaching your dreams?			
	Yes	No	Response
Fiona		√	<i>"... not actually ... it doesn't matter if you are a man or if you're a woman you will achieve what you want in life if you're just dedicated to what you want to become in life. It's just that we differ from body shape ... but we're all the same ... if one can obtain good marks, the other one can also obtain good marks".</i>
Amy		√	<i>"... for me being a female won't stop me from achieving my dreams ... it will be determined by the way I am studying and if it is okay. Most of the male students put more concentration onto other things ... Many boys are talented in making music and sometimes they don't even think of their school work".</i>

Vicky	√	"... I don't believe that because it's just depending on what kinds of subjects you like or career you wanna have. They are not serious ... most of them are bunking classes ... they know that there are not any career aspirations for them ...".
Essie	√	"... I see a lot of males achieving their dreams but it's also females ... I think if they have the encouragement and if they have the strength and the will to be what they want to become one day, then I think there's nothing to stop them. I want to show them that it's not always boys who can do that ... we are girls and we are not suppose to achieve that much, but they always push us to the next level ... and I thought this is it ... I have to start thinking ahead and doing my stuff".
Joan	√	"... I don't think so ... as a girl I am gonna reach my goals ... boys ... think that they are better than girls ... and sometimes when you wanna become something they would just say that you are not that skilled ...".
Vee	√	"... I don't ... I believe that everybody is equal and what a man can do a woman can also do".

All six participants believed that the fact that they are girls would not prevent them from accomplishing their dreams. Essie was convinced that boys inspired her to go the extra mile when they claimed that boys achieved more than girls.

Amy, Vicky, Essie and Vee felt that boys and girls had the same ability at different subjects. For instance, Amy said girls also performed well in Woodwork because it "... is based on a person's talent". She said a girl could opt for Woodwork as a subject "... if a girl is talented in making things out of wood". Vicky claimed that boys and girls performed the same at all the subjects "... depending on how the person studies". Essie believed that boys and girls performed equally at Life Science and Mathematics. She said Life Science is "... more about ... learning about your environment" and boys and girls liked to keep in touch with their immediate surroundings. Furthermore, Vee claimed that girls and boys performed equally at all the subjects except for Home Economics and Craft and Technology, which is either meant for girls or boys. However, she suggested that girls should also take Craft and Technology; and boys Home Economics.

On the other hand, Fiona and Joan felt that boys and girls did not have the same ability at different subjects. Fiona claimed that girls were more serious than boys as "... they want to achieve something in life". She also believed that girls performed better than boys in subjects such as German, Life Science and Physical Science. Joan argued that boys performed better than girls in Accounting and Mathematics as boys are "... maybe just gifted in those subjects ... or they dream ... to work ... in banks or to become Accountants ...". She further claimed

that girls performed best in languages and they “... *want to become secretaries and teachers*”.

Fiona, Amy, Vicky and Vee felt that there were no subjects meant for boys only. By contrast, Essie and Joan felt there *were* certain subjects that were meant for boys only. Essie claimed that Engineering and Physical Science were meant for boys only, as “... *it's more chemical stuff*”. Joan stated that Mathematics and Accounting were meant for boys only.

Amy, Vicky and Essie argued that girls are better than boys at Mathematics and Science. Amy remarked that girls “*today ... are winning ...*” boys in these subjects. Vicky claimed that girls out-performed boys in that girls “... *maybe get 80-90 percent and boys 50-60 percent*” in these subjects. Vee said that boys and girls performed equally in Mathematics. However, she claimed that boys performed better than girls in Science because boys “... *can draw*”. She reasoned that drawing is a natural talent that boys received from God that gave them an advantage over girls in the examination. She said that boys would “... *draw exactly the way that people want it, but girls would have ... skew lines*”. Fiona and Joan, on the other hand, argued that boys performed better than girls in Science and Mathematics.

When I asked the girls which gender was more vocal in class, all of them agreed that girls responded much more than boys in class, except Amy. According to Fiona and Vee, boys are “*quiet*” or “*shy*”. Vicky and Joan felt that girls wanted to prove to their male counterparts that girls could compete on even grounds with boys. Nevertheless, Amy seemed to be the only one who believed that boys were more vocal in class. She argued that this was a “... *natural thing for boys*” as “*most of the girls are very shy ...*”. She believed that it was natural for girls to be shy and soft.

The girls argued that being male or female could make a difference in accomplishing one's educational and vocational aspirations. Fiona said that she “... *prefer being a girl, cause if you're a boy, you have to work very hard to bring bread in the house...*”. It appeared as if Fiona thought that if you were a girl, your chances to fulfill your educational and vocational aspirations were better than boys'. Boys had to dedicate most of their time to their jobs in order to take good care of the family. Joan believed in traditional roles assigned by society to women where girls needed to know how to take care of children and other household duties.

All the girls argued that it was important for women to be independent. They believed that a proper education would assure their independency. In addition, the girls felt that being independent would help them not to look to their husbands or parents for everything they might need in the future.

In the next section, I present the views of my participants regarding challenges they faced as teenage girls. I also report on the ways in which their parents and teachers could have helped them more with the challenges they faced.

4.8 THE CHALLENGES THE GIRLS SAW THEMSELVES HAVING TO FACE

I asked the girls to report on the challenges they faced as teenage female learners. See Table 11 below.

Table 11: Challenges faced by girls.

	Challenges
Fiona	<i>"... education ... that's what I see as a challenge ... and you can prove to them that you can become something in life because if it's not challenging then it might be that you won't achieve something in life".</i>
Amy	<i>"What I see as challenges is that girls are working hard to be better than boys in subjects like Mathematics and Science because I want to prove to them that I can also be good in Mathematics".</i>
Vicky	<i>"Me and my friend we are competing ... I have that feeling that I must do better so that I can just beat her ... so that I can just be the best".</i>
Essie	<i>"... people trying to be better than me and I think that-that's a challenge to me because I also want to show that person that it isn't always that person that can achieve this or do this ... I can also do it. I have to put my goal and try to achieve it even though I haven't achieved it yet, I'm still trying".</i>
Joan	<i>"Challenging the boys ... boys can really break you down ... if it's competition ... Maths and accounting ... to show them that we as girls can also be better than them or can also do what they can do ... and not show them the bad side of you, but the strong side as well. Sometimes as a girl you won't be able to do the duties at home for example, you won't be directed to cooking and when you cook for the rest of the family ... sometimes your brother might also be judging you at what you do and think that if you become married you won't be a good wife ... that can also be challenging ... you as the girl will get married and have to take care of your husband and children".</i>
Vee	<i>"Maybe my studies ... yah ... my studies. I will take it as a challenge. I will put great effort in it so that I can at least be successful ... even now as a grade ten learner".</i>

What I concluded from the participants' responses above is that all of them were quite determined to perform better than their male counterparts or friends. They regarded it a challenge to prove to boys and other people, in general, that they could also be successful in

life. Bearing in mind what my participants said about the challenges they faced, I identified a certain pattern from their responses. It seemed that the girls responded in pairs. Fiona and Vee claimed that trying to pursue their studies as such is a challenge. Amy and Joan agreed that it is a challenge to prove to their male counterparts that girls too could score good grades in Mathematics and Science or even perform better than boys. Vicky and Essie argued that it is a challenge to show their peers that they could also beat them academically or be the best.

4.9 CONCLUSION

In this section, I have distilled the main points emerging from the data. All six of the participants seemed to enjoy school. Nevertheless, some of them also remarked that there were certain things about school that they are not satisfied with. As regards to their parents' influence on their academic performance, they said that their parents motivated them to a large extent to achieve success in future life although they all wished there was more that their parents would do for them. On the same point, some of the girls felt that their teachers too encouraged them to be successful at school. However, some of them blamed certain teachers for not helping them to reach their full potential in terms of certain subjects.

The girls had divided views on the way in which teachers responded to male and female learners. Some of them felt that certain teachers treated all learners equally, but others felt that certain teachers had biased attitudes towards girls and boys. Mention was also made of the influence of peers on academic performance. Vee argued that ones peers could have either a good influence or a bad influence on one's academic performance, while Vicky said that her friends were her greatest source of inspiration to go to school. In terms of curriculum aspects, the girls' preference for commercial subjects came through very strongly. Three of the girls believed that their school textbooks portrayed girls' contribution to society in a negative way; the other three believed that their textbooks continued to acknowledge girls' contributions to society in a positive light.

The girls remarked that caring for an HIV/AIDS patient in a family was largely seen to be the responsibility of girls, thus limiting time they could have spent with their schoolwork. They also felt that teenage pregnancy would inevitably have a detrimental effect on girls' educational and vocational aspirations.

It seemed that all six participants believed that their femalehood would not necessarily prevent them from achieving their future dreams and hopes. Instead they regarded it as a challenge. Finally, these girls expected their parents and teachers to encourage, support, advise, and be open with them regarding the challenges they faced as teenagers.

In my final chapter, I conclude my analyses of each of these key issues, most especially in light of literature consulted.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I restate my research goal and provide an overview of the data generated in the light of the literature reviewed. I focus on the conclusions that have been drawn with regard to my research questions. Thereafter, the focus will shift to lessons learned from the research undertaking as a whole and some possibilities for further research.

5.2 DISCUSSION

In this section I attempt a deeper level of analysis in order to explore what is to be learned from the information gathered from the girls concerning their educational aspirations. At the heart of this chapter is the identification of key themes emerging from my findings. These themes will be interpreted in light of the literature discussed in Chapter Two.

In identifying emerging themes, I have made use of the framework set up in the previous chapter. I have attempted to detach myself from the findings in order to answer two questions: firstly, what are the data *really* telling me here about the ways that girls' educational aspirations are shaped by their schooling experiences; and secondly, based on what the data tell me, what implications does this have for me as a member of the teaching profession?

The following key themes emerged:

- Personal experiences of school: Girls actually enjoy school, but school is not always fun.
- Significant others: Parents are important, and so are teachers, but they sometimes let us down.
- Peer influence is a surprisingly small threat ... according to the research subjects..
- The curriculum: Commercial subjects still enjoy preference, but textbooks arouse mixed feelings.

- Poverty: it's not necessarily all bad news.
- The effect of HIV/AIDS or falling pregnant: A real threat to a girl's aspirations.
- Our sense of where we want to go? We're actually quite realistic and not too 'phased' by boys.

In the following sections I discuss each of these themes in detail.

5.2.1 PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL: GIRLS ACTUALLY ENJOY SCHOOL, BUT SCHOOL IS NOT ALWAYS FUN

The findings of my research reveal that the girls indeed liked school. All six participants believed that school provides them with knowledge and prepares them for a better future. Vicky, for example, said that it was better for her to be at school than to be at home. Although she was not very happy at the particular school where I conducted my research, she nonetheless said that for her, school was a place where she could at least be with her friends. Looking at my data, I sense a feeling of determination from the girls. They genuinely would like to complete their education as their fondness of school revealed.

Some of my participants had concerns about their particular school and not schooling in general. Two of the girls struggled with the workload as well as with the fact that the higher the grade they were enrolled in, the more difficult the content of the syllabuses became. Additional problems, but common to any school, were mentioned such as skipping classes, no respect for authority and the outbreak of fights.

5.2.2 SIGNIFICANT OTHERS: PARENTS ARE IMPORTANT, AND SO ARE TEACHERS, BUT THEY SOMETIMES LET US DOWN

Significant others play an essential role in learners' lives. Learners are dependent on the approval of their parents, teachers and peers especially with regard to their educational aspirations (Burns, 1986; The role of school in United States adolescents' lives, 1999). Parents in particular, are regarded as "the most important significant others" (Burns, 1986:203) in the world of the child.

Through time parents have had a major influence have on their children's, especially teenagers', education (The role of school in United States adolescents' lives, 1999).

According to Burns (1986), children always seek the approval of their parents regarding their academic affairs. From my own teaching experience, many parents guide their teenagers in their subject choices when they reach high school. In many cases, learners request permission to take the school registration form home so that their parents can advise them on their subject choices.

The predominant impression I gained from my individual interviews with the girls is that they see their parents as the biggest source of inspiration in accomplishing their academic goals. The girls acknowledged their parents' hopes and dreams for them to become independent in life and strive beyond the myth that a girl is only good to become a child bearer and house cleaner. Oakley described such perceptions as being based on "myths of male superiority and ... the domestic oppression of women" (cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2000:133). I found this view rather different from Tjipueja's, who wrote that female learners' eagerness to continue their education is reduced by the "social expectation of girls that they should become good housewives and mothers" (Tjipueja, 2001:5). It appears that such stereotypes in our contemporary societies have not dampened these Namibian girls' enthusiasm to pursue their educational aspirations, especially where parental support is a significant factor.

Despite the fact that parental support was echoed so strongly in the data, the girls felt that their parents ought to do more to *really* help them with achieving their educational hopes and dreams. Since these girls perceived their education as their major challenge, they suggested ways in which they thought their parents could assist them more with the difficulties they faced as Grade Ten learners.

Vee, for instance, mentioned that her parents encouraged her to obtain good grades, but they did "not really" motivate her as their jobs are more important to them. The girls felt that although their parents motivated them to study hard, they did not genuinely go the extra mile to make it easier for them to accomplish their goals. According to Tjipueja (2001) and Lyle (2003), parents have a great deal of power over their children's future aspirations and can create an environment for academic failure or success. These girls thought that their parents should show more interest in their schoolwork in order to 'push' them to optimum achievement.

In addition, they would appreciate the support and advice of their parents; not only regarding academic matters, but also with regard to the challenges they themselves had to face when they (the parents) were young. It was especially important to Joan and Vee not to make the same mistakes their parents had made as teenagers. I concluded from this that, for these two girls, repeating the mistakes made by their parents would almost certainly have a detrimental effect on their future hopes and dreams. They therefore viewed preventative measures as being important for their future road to success. Although they felt it was wrong, for example, to indulge in sexual activities while at school, they preferred their *parents* to tell them that it was wrong to practice pre-marital sex. They seemed to want their parents explicitly to show them that they cared about their teenage daughters and to warn and protect them against the dangers of life faced by teenage girls, in particular. The girls who participated in my study revealed, through their responses, that, precisely as Burns argued, their parents remain their “most important significant others” (1986:203).

Teachers’ views continue to be seen as important to any child of any age. This confirms the important role of a teacher as a significant other in a child’s academic life. Learners look to their teachers for guidance, advice and support. That being said, my study reveals that some of these girls’ teachers appear to have failed them in this regard. For example, Vicky, Essie and Vee indicated that on some occasions when they asked their teachers to explain something to them, the teachers gave them inadequate attention. The girls found this treatment disturbing, as for all learners, teachers are “important ‘mirrors’ to [their] emerging sense of their own [academic] ‘worth’” (Robertson, 2004:16). These claims of neglect contrast with the findings of Anderson-Levitt et al.’s research in which girls testified that teachers regularly tried to involve them in classroom discussions (1998).

All three teachers about whom Fiona, Vicky and Essie complained were female. However, interestingly, these same girls subsequently contradicted themselves somewhat when they said that female teachers generally treated male and female learners equally in the classroom. On the other hand, three of the girls - Amy, Joan and Vee - argued that they got the impression that male teachers, as well as some of the female teachers, preferred to work with boys. In this respect, my data echoes the observations made by both Gilbert and Taylor (1992); and Sadker and Sadker (as cited in Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998). Furthermore, data from my interviews with the girls echo the findings of researchers such as Serbin and O’Leary (as cited in Owens, 1987); Zietsman (1997); and Francis (2000) that teachers tend to

show more interest in boys' efforts. This particular piece of evidence provides teachers with a valuable lesson to be learned by all teachers that girls are sensitive to teachers' unspoken messages; they want to not only be seen, but also heard, and taken just as seriously as boys.

Joan and Vee both claimed that where teachers who were perceived as preferring to work with boys, boys then actually performed academically better than girls. This perception lends support to the findings of the Harvard School of Education and The American Association of University Women (2002) that teachers are more willing to give positive acknowledgement to boys' intellectual contributions than girls'. If a teacher's attitude gives learners the impression that he/she values one party more than another, learners who are 'expected' to perform less well may adopt a negligent attitude towards their schoolwork (Robertson, 2004). This provides a demonstration of the idea of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' so vividly captured in Rosenthal and Jacobsen's 1968 study: *Pygmalion in the classroom* (as cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2000:276-277). My sense is that the negative attitude of some of the teachers towards girls may have spurred them on to study even harder in order to beat boys in their schoolwork which would account for why the girls' (positive) self-concept came out so strongly in my data.

.My data revealed that the girls genuinely sought advice on life experiences *inter alia*, peer pressure, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS from their teachers. Joan and Vee, in particular, argued that it was the onus of the teacher to talk about the 'taboos of life' their parents so often refused to talk about. It was these same two girls who felt that their *parents* should not only encourage their children to study harder, but should also give them advice on life experiences to guide them through their difficult teenage years.

These views from the participants were a genuine eye opener for me. As an educator I was made aware that girls should not to be overlooked because they give the impression of being more silent and obedient than their male counterparts. Girls today are "insisting to be heard and fighting for the right to learn" as stated by Davison and Kanyuka (as cited in Anderson-Levitt et al., 1998:102).

5.2.3 PEER INFLUENCE: A SURPRISINGLY SMALL THREAT

APPARENTLY

It has been shown that as children grow older they favour the opinions of their friends or classmates over those of their parents or teachers (Epstein & Wallace, as cited in Antonio, 2004). Irrespective of the notion that peer pressure is part of all children's school life, I was surprised when only two participants indicated that peer pressure could either positively or negatively influence one's educational aspirations. Vee said that her friends were her greatest source of inspiration for getting good grades at school. This view quite clearly complements Wallace's who argued that peer groups influence "members' attitudes towards the attainment of high grades, academic achievement, and aspirations for graduate study" (as cited in Antonio, 2004). Vicky too mentioned her friends having inspired her to go to school every day. She described the competition between herself and her friend for scoring the best possible grades as a challenge for her to pursue her education. But Vee also admitted that peers might have a possible bad effect on their friends' academic performance. In Vee's case, I suspect that claims in the literature regarding peer pressure influences may have over-estimated the extent to which the peer group constitutes this adolescent's most significant others (Bourne, 2001).

5.2.4 THE CURRICULUM: COMMERCIAL SUBJECTS STILL ENJOY

PREFERENCE, BUT TEXTBOOKS AROUSE MIXED FEELINGS

The majority of the participants in my study argued that girls were better than boys in Science and Mathematics. Amy for instance, argued that girls out-performed boys in these previously male-dominated subjects. This finding aligns with Francis' (2000) argument that girls are no longer discouraged from choosing so-called masculine subjects. Amy and Essie gave Science related examples as one of the reasons why they enjoyed school. My conclusion from the latter is that the girls seemed to view Science as a challenging educational platform from where they could compete without prejudice against their male counterparts on equal grounds. They did not see Science as a male-dominated domain. I find this view in opposition to that of Bouya who argued that the Science curriculum does not cater for the needs of female learners (as cited in Brenner, 1998). The girls in my study were determined to show their male counterparts their academic prowess which indicates a healthy perception of self.

The girls also seemed to challenge perception of the traditional boundaries between so-called 'male' and 'female' curriculum areas. Amy, for example, held the belief that girls could do well in Woodwork. She said it depended on one's natural ability to perform tasks meant for boys. Similarly, Vee suggested that boys should be encouraged to take Home Economics and girls Craft and Technology as both parties might need the skills gained by studying these subjects in their future lives.

My data show that my participants took great interest in commercial subjects especially, Business Management and Accounting. The girls said they believe that they perform well in the subjects they liked. My findings indicate that the girls generally performed poorly in those subjects that they liked least. What I have deduced from their perceptions of History and Geography is that these subjects are seen as 'dead' subjects with little value in terms of affecting learners' chances to meet their future aspirations.

Textbooks have been said not to do much to enhance girls' position in society (Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997). With regard to the perceptions my participants had about how their textbooks portrayed their contribution to society, I sensed a difference of opinion among the girls. Some of them indicated that their textbooks did indeed portray girls in a negative stereotypical light, as argued by UNESCO (2003). Essie very explicitly showed her disapproval of the way in which girls were continually portrayed as 'sex objects' and the main cause of all modern diseases. Amy and Vicky believed that, contrary to the view of, for example, Aikman et al. (2005) textbooks sometimes might contribute to girls' low educational aspirations, these girls' textbooks provided them with the kind of information they needed to be independent and succeed in life.

5.2.5 POVERTY: IT'S NOT NECESSARILY ALL BAD NEWS

O'Meare and Hailongo (as cited in Kasanda & Shaimemanya, 1997) identified poverty as one of the factors that could have a diminishing effect on the educational aspirations of young girls. Although none of my participants seemed to live in poverty as all of their parents/guardians are employed and they progressed as far as Grade Ten in school, they were all concerned about lack of money to pursue further studies. By contrast, it was striking to note how determined the girls in my study were to finish their school careers. Bearing in mind their background, it is clear why these girls were determined to excel academically. As Table 2 showed, none of these girls' parents or guardians have very well-paid jobs (with the

exception of Amy's guardian who was a Financial Accountant). Fiona, for example, stated that her low living standard inspired her to study harder at school. According to her, poverty ought not to stop girls from completing their school career and accomplishing their future educational dreams. It appears that my participants, if perhaps they were poverty-stricken, would not have allowed that to prevent them from being educationally challenged; it might have motivated these girls to study harder and stay longer in school.

Middleton and Ashworth noted that financial constraints might have a negative effect on learners' "school attainment since parents may not be able to afford the ... books ... and learning resources ... that can aid success" (as cited in Bramley & Karley, 2005:6). Essie is an example of this. She believed that her difficult circumstances at home might well force her to start working immediately after finishing her Grade Twelve (as opposed to being able to continue on to tertiary studies). She did regard further education as important however and said that she could perhaps continue with her studies at a later stage in her life. The girls identified lack of money as a possible limiting effect on their educational aspirations, although for some there was a potential 'remedy': Fiona, for example, unwittingly seems to have echoed Archer et al.'s observation that many schoolgirls turn to secret boyfriends, also called sugar daddies, who give them money that might be used for school (2007).

5.2.6 THE EFFECT OF HIV/AIDS OR FALLING PREGNANT: A REAL THREAT TO A GIRL'S ASPIRATIONS

Collins and Rau (2000) found that many cultures leave girls with no other choice, but to take care of HIV/AIDS patients in a family. These girls might then "be withdrawn from school to do so" (Collins & Rau, 2000:12). A UNESCO report revealed that this pandemic robs many girls of their right to education (2003). My participants' views on this particular aspect correlate with both Collins and Rau's and UNESCO's. The girls also indicated that it seemed to remain the responsibility of women - and girls for that matter - to look after HIV/AIDS patients in a family. They argued that such a responsibility might deprive girls of much-needed study time let alone the accomplishments of their educational aspirations. This perception also lends support to Kelly's claim that HIV/AIDS might have a negative impact on girls' opportunity to pursue their academic aspirations in that it could "reduce the likelihood of their school attendance" (2000:10). Although these girls did not mention any negative influence of the disease directly on themselves or their schoolwork, they were well

aware of the fact that HIV/AIDS is a reality in our society; that the likelihood of them being placed in the shoes of any other girl who had real lived experiences of the disease.

Nevertheless, Essie saw a way out that might allow girls sufficient study time. She argued that family members ought to support each other if there happens to be an HIV/AIDS patient among them. She believed that if school-going girls could be assisted in caring for the sick, such girls would have more time to devote to their studies.

As previously noted, recent statistics have indicated that teenage pregnancies amount to 9% of the total number of pregnant women in Namibia (Iipinge & Lebeau, 2005). The participants argued that pregnancy while in school could very definitely jeopardise a girl's chances to complete her education. It surprised me when the participants blamed the girl herself.

My findings also revealed that girls who get pregnant while in school compromise their education. Such girls then would have to put up with "responsibilities of parenting, financial burdens and whether to continue schooling" (Archer et al., 2007; *The role of school in United States adolescents' lives*, 1999). That being said, it was interesting that one of the girls viewed teenage pregnancy as a possible source of inspiration for schoolgirls to return to school after having given birth. These girls' main motivation would be to show to society that they "would work very hard to achieve something" (Fiona). The girls clearly welcomed the current teenage pregnancy policy followed by government schools in Namibia. They argued that girls were now free to return to school, if they so wished, to complete their school career thereby increasing their chances of a better future.

My study revealed, however, that these girls felt that schoolboys ought to be equally treated for getting a schoolgirl pregnant. They made it very clear that they thought boys too should be suspended from school for the same period of time as the girl. For example, Fiona very strongly asserted that a boy ought to stay at home so as to lend a helping hand to the teenage mother for that first year of his baby's life.

5.2.7 OUR SENSE OF WHERE WE WANT TO GO? WE'RE ACTUALLY QUITE REALISTIC AND NOT TOO 'PHASED' BY BOYS!

In my attempt to find whether a relationship exists between the girls' perceived educational performance and their future vocational aspirations, the girls in my study indicated that they believed their academic performance could help them to achieve their future vocational hopes and dreams. Peters and Hansen (1977) argued that one's educational performance determines one's occupational choice. Francis noted that girls value their educational achievement as it can help them to fight any form of discrimination they might face in the job market (2000). Considering my data, it appeared that these girls were determined not to allow themselves to be oppressed in the job market. It was found though that women might require higher levels of attainment if they are to be successful in competition for jobs, equal pay and decision-making positions (UNESCO, 2003). So, the girls were trying to tell me is that their future is in *their* hands. They refused to be victims and took responsibility for their lives which supports Gouws and Kruger who claim self-concept is the "image a person has of himself and is unique, personal and highly meaningful to the person concerned" (1996:6).

Furthermore, the girls who perceived their academic performance to be between 75 and 90% hoped to qualify themselves in the fields of Financial Accounting, Engineering and/or the medical field. Those who perceived their academic performance range between 50 and 60% hoped to qualify themselves as Fashion Designer, Air Hostess or Journalist. Biraimah (as cited in Brenner, 1998) believed that girls' vocational aspirations were significantly lower than those of boys. However, it appears that my girls did not agree with this claim. What I concluded from their views is that the girls seemed to set quite achievable vocational dreams for themselves. The view expressed by Iiping and Lebeau (2005) that women persist in becoming teachers and nurses in some developed as well as developing countries seemed not to form part of these Namibian girls' vocational aspirations.

Just as Brenner's study (1998) revealed that girls were more likely to believe that they could attain the same grades as boys, even though boys perceived themselves smarter and more intelligent than girls, my participants argued that the chauvinist attitude of some male learners would not prevent them (i.e. the girls) from excelling in their education. They believed that girls could do anything as well as or even better than their male counterparts. My findings showed that these girls were more eager to participate in lessons than their male counterparts and, as claimed by Francis, were in general willing to work harder than boys (2000:71).

Contrary to Stanworth's claim (as cited in Burns, 1986), it did not seem to me that the girls underestimated their ability when they compared themselves to boys. Bearing in mind Gouws and Kruger's (1996) claim that a good self-concept is regarded as essential to learner success, it seems that all the participants perceived themselves as having a strong self-concept. They also regarded their independence as something that could not be compromised: Essie, for example, insisted that boys' macho attitudes inspired her to work harder.

5.3 CONCLUSION

I have come to the conclusion that my findings from this small group of Namibian girls challenges many of the findings reported in the literature. My study, for instance, found that these girls genuinely had a healthy perception of self. They would not allow any stereotypical behaviour to prevent them from reaching their potential. The girls did not view biases in the curriculum as an obstacle to achieving their educational aspirations. My research revealed that Amy, Vicky and Essie perceived themselves to be better at Maths and Science than boys. They further believed that their academic attainment would enhance their chances of achieving their hopes and dreams. With regard to male dominance, it appears that the girls' positive self-concept neutralised the findings of literature reviewed that boys continue to dominate girls in certain spheres of life.

It appears that parental support plays a key role in these girls' lives, but that their teachers turned out to be not as supportive as the literature reviewed suggests they should be. The girls acknowledged their parents as their most important significant others. Peer influence seemed not to be a major determinant of success or failure in their lives. Provided they have parental support, poverty too could not stand in the way of the successes they hoped to achieve. These girls also identified a possible way of exempting a girl from sole responsibility of caring for an HIV/AIDS patient in a family. While literature identifies teenage pregnancy as a potential obstacle that might limit a girl's educational aspirations, here too the girls in my study acknowledged that Namibia's official policy on teenage pregnancy could work to prevent their complete exclusion from subsequent educational opportunity

5.4 LESSONS LEARNED

When I started on my research, I had little knowledge of research methods. At the time I wrote my research proposal I did not even understand the difference between a category and a theme. Nevertheless, as time passed and I got more confident with some of the research terminology, I really started to enjoy what I was investigating. Every new chapter became a challenge to me especially the introduction and conclusion to each chapter as they happened to be the most difficult sections of the writing-up process.

A valuable lesson I as a teacher have learned from this study is that girls need to be given as much attention as their male counterparts in class. They not only want classroom discussions which focus on subject/lesson content; they want their teachers to show a willingness to engage more actively in discussing the kinds of risky social, sexual, professional, and economic things they might be facing as young girls, and strategies and attitudes and values that could offer them some protection against these. I realised that some of these issues - for example sex education - could perhaps contribute to girls developing into autonomous and self-confident members of society if such issues were effectively offered in schools as prescribed by the formal curriculum.

5.5 SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is beyond the scope of my study to explore this topic any further, but I encourage other researchers to perhaps follow up on some aspects of it. I have four suggestions for possible further research. They are as follows. Firstly, it would be interesting to conduct research on what views the teachers held regarding the girls' educational background and aspirations, and how this might influence the nature of their interactions with the girls. Secondly, an investigation of the parents' and/or guardians' perceptions might allow deeper and broader insight into the issue under investigation. A link to parental attitude and socio-economic background in the Namibian context might throw up some interesting anomalies relative to the more developed overseas countries. Thirdly, research could be conducted to learn more about the perceptions of boys in relation to their female counterparts. This might allow for comparisons to be drawn between the views of boys and those of girls. And finally, it would

be potentially *very* interesting to make this into a vertical (ongoing) study by interviewing these same six girls in two, four, and perhaps ten years' time – this latter time-span being the magical 10 years hence that some of the girls spoke of.

From my own point of view as a teacher this research has made me very aware of the obstacles and challenges teenage girls face in their different communities. I really value what I have learned from doing this investigation, and will certainly use this to inform my interactions with my learners from here on.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT LETTER - PRINCIPAL

Mrs. A. Willemse
P.O. Box 50595
Bachbrecht
Namibia

13 February 2006

The Principal

Dear Sir

I am registered as a part-time student at Rhodes University (student number 605W5158). I have been studying for a Master's Degree in General Education Theory & Practice (GETP) since February 2005. I would be most grateful if you would allow me to use your school as my research site for the research report that I am required to write.

The aim of my research project is to investigate the educational aspirations of female learners in a selected high school. My objectives are firstly, to investigate the factors that hinder the educational performance of female learners, secondly, to find out whether there is a relationship between their educational performance and vocational aspirations and finally, to find out how these girls perceive themselves in relation to their male counterparts. Should you agree to allow me to use your school as a research site, six grade 10 female learners who are willing to participate in this project will be interviewed to gather data on said topic. Participation will be done on an absolute voluntarily basis. Participants as well as their parents will be asked for permission (in writing) to audio-tape these interviews.

The school, parents and learners are assured of anonymity in the final research report and will be invited to proofread drafts of the report to ensure that details are accurately recorded and reported.

Should you have any concerns or questions about this report, you can contact me at 240906 or 0812831009 after hours.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely

Anneley Willemse

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM - PRINCIPAL

Anneley Willemse is hereby given permission to record interviews at my school as part of the process of her data collection for a research report that she will be writing for the completion of her Master's Degree. I understand that transcripts will be made of the interview and that extracts from these may be used in the final report. I have been assured that my school and learners will have anonymity in that report.

Signed:-----

(Principal)

Date:-----

APPENDIX E

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I split my interview questions into six categories so as to gather as much as possible data on my research questions . Categories are as follows:

QUESTIONS:

Category 1: Perceptions of how personal experiences help girls in school.

1. How have your experiences of school been so far?
2. What do you think has influenced/ influences your educational performance?
3. What do you think is the best/worse being in school?
4. What are your favourite subjects at school?
Are these the subjects you're good at and why?
5. What are your least favourite subjects at school?
Are these the subjects you're worst at and why?
6. What, in your opinion, are the factors that enhance/hinder whether we can achieve your aspirations or not?

Category 2: (Linking school to career dreams):

1. Do you believe that there is a relationship between your educational performance and what you hope to do as a career?
2. What is your dream career?
3. Where would you like to be in ten years time?
4. What do you think will help you to achieve this dream?
5. What will perhaps stop you?

Category 3: (How realistic the girls' aspirations are in relation to their self-identity)

1. How important do you feel your dream career is in terms of how your school career has shaped up so far?
2. Do you think being an ideal student will help you to achieve your career ambitions?
3. What is the ideal student?
4. How well do you think you fit into this picture?

Category 4: (Getting an idea of how well informed the girls might be about achieving their aspirations)

1. What job do you hope to do in the future?
2. Do you think that further education is important?
3. Are you planning to continue with further education?
3. Have you thought of which study course to follow one day?
4. From whom did you get the most information about possible careers/study courses?
5. Who had the greatest influence on the job of your dreams/choice of study?

Category 5: (Gather information on gender)

1. Do you think that being a female puts you at a disadvantage in terms of reaching your dreams and of achieving well?
2. How do you see male learners?

3. Do you think that male and female students have the same ability at different subjects?
If 'yes/no', which subjects are involved and why?
4. Do you think certain subjects are meant for boys only? If 'yes', which subjects are involved and why?
5. Do you think that boys are better at Science and Mathematics than girls?
6. Which gender is more vocal in class, male or female students, and why??
7. How about outside school, society more generally, do you think being a male or female student affects your life or makes a difference to your life in any way?
8. Do you think it is important for girls to be independent?
9. Do you think that teachers respond to boys and girls differently and why?

Category 6: (Information on challenges faced by teenage girls)

1. What do you see as challenges?
2. How do you think your teachers and parents can help you more with the challenges that you are facing as an adolescent?

APPENDIX G

SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE - ALL SIX PARTICIPANTS

QUESTIONS:

1. What are your future hopes and dreams?
2. Do you think textbooks are portraying (showing) girls' contribution to society in a positive way? Yes/No and why do you say so?
3. How regular do your parents/guardians encourage you to finish school or when you write tests or exams?
4. How do you feel about your parents' contribution towards encouraging you to make a success of your school work?
5. Do you know someone who has HIV/AIDS?
6. How does it make you feel?
7. Do you think having an HIV/AIDS relative can influence one's school work in a negative way? Explain.
8. How regular do you hear about girls of your age (in your school) getting pregnant?
9. Who do you think is responsible for impregnating girls?
10. Do you think it can influence these girls' academic performance and in what way?

APPENDIX H

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW - TRANSCRIPT

PARTICIPANTS:

- **Essie**
- **Joan**
- **Fiona**
- **Vicky**

Anneley: Good morning girls.

Girls : Good morning Miss.

Anneley: I want to do a focus group interview to get the views of each one of you ... so we are going to have a discussion on certain questions ... The first question is ... do you think, when you look at your textbooks ... in general, all your textbooks of your different subjects ... do you think that more examples of girls are being given or more examples of boys when you deal with a certain topic.

Girls : More examples of girls [all together].

Anneley: More examples of girls ... okay, in which subjects?

Girls : Life Science.

Anneley: In Science subjects. Okay, how do they show girls ... in what kind of professions do they use examples of girls?

Essie : Like ... for instance ... at the back they show pregnancy ... how the girl gets pregnant and they show diseases ... getting diseases. They always show how they get AIDS and then a girl and a boy ... they show the girl ... mostly they show the girl ... I think mostly it shows that the girl that she doesn't ... she's always the problem ... she begins with the problem.

Anneley: Uhm ... okay, and why do you think that-that is so why do they use girls ... sort of highlight girls when it comes to diseases?

Joan : I think ... because they want to protect girls or something ...

Anneley: Is it ... from what ...?

Joan : Types of diseases ... or maybe for us to abstain ...

Anneley: Okay, in what kind of examples do you think they use boys mostly ... in what kind of jobs do they use boys mostly?

Fiona : For instance ... like in Bus... sometimes in Mathematics ... they use boys, for instance ... like ... when picking up stuff, like hard work ... they mostly show

boys.

Anneley: Is it?

Vicky : In Physics.

Fiona : And in Physics ... yah.

Anneley: Okay, now in Science ... you said that they use examples of girls when they want to show examples of people contracting diseases ... now, in what kind of examples do they use boys ... in any other subject ... if they perhaps talk about professions or jobs? Do you have examples of that in your textbooks? **[Nobody could think of an answer to this question]**. You can't think now of any example? Okay, now ... do you think, when you look at these examples of girls in textbooks ... in pictures ... do you think they show girls in a positive way or in a negative way?

Vicky : Sometimes in a positive way ... sometimes in a negative way.

Anneley: Okay, can you give me an example of a positive way ... something that puts girls in a good light when they use girls in an example? **[Nobody responded on this question]**. Okay, when they show girls as an example of contracting diseases or starting with that, do you think that is negative or do you think that is positive.

Essie : It is negative.

Anneley: Why?

Essie : Because the girl ... it's now her problem ... she is now the main concern ... seems like she is giving the diseases ... she's spreading the diseases.

Anneley: Uhm ... okay, do you feel that your parents motivate you enough to achieve your future hopes and dreams?

Girls : Yah, yes, yes, yes.

Essie : Very much.

Anneley: Very much ... now which one of the two is it ... do you refer to your father or do you refer to your mother?

Girls : To my mother [all four].

Anneley: Okay, so she is the one who mostly motivate you to achieve you future hopes and dreams ... and what do you think about that ... why do you think your mother is always the one who is motivating you more ...?

Essie : Maybe it's what she wanted to achieve her whole life.

Vicky : She cares about you.

Anneley: Okay ... what else?

Vicky : She wants me to be someone in future.

Anneley: Do you think that is important ... to be someone in future?

Girls : Yes it is very important [all four].

Anneley: Why is it important?

Joan : To get more respect.

Anneley: To get more respect ... from whom?

Joan : From society.

Vicky : And to depend on your own.

Anneley: Okay, you can depend on yourself ... what else ... how do you feel, Violet?

Violet : In order to be respected, Miss.

Anneley: Okay, now why is it so important to be respected ... as girls?

Essie : If you are not respected ... then people will walk over you ... they won't take any note of you ... they will mostly push you down and tell you so ... I think respect is very important ... you have to have respect to own respect.

Anneley: Okay, uhm ... do you think that ... when you have ... or if you know someone who is having AIDS ... if you don't know someone it is also okay ... but who do you think ... who's responsibility is it in society to take care of HIV/AIDS people ... patients?

Joan : Girls.

Anneley: Now why do you think they put girls in the shoes of looking after these people ... taking care of them?

Essie : Because women show more concern and ...

Anneley: Uhm ... in what way?

Vicky : In emotional ways and caring for ...

Anneley: Caring for the person?

Vicky : Yah ... they're more emotional.

Anneley: Okay, now do you think if a girl who is going school for instance ... if she has to take care of an HIV/AIDS patient ... do you think that can influence her academic performance?

Joan : Yes ...

Fiona : Not actually, Miss ... as long as she knows how ... the disadvantages and the advantages of HIV or how you get it ... how you can prevent it ... not to be a problem.

Anneley: Okay, you said yes Joan ...

Joan : Because uhm ... sometimes you drop out of school to take care of the person or mostly at school ... the only thing that is on your mind is how the person is feeling at home or whether the person is still alive or whether the person is dead.

Anneley: Uhm ... okay, now what do you think about the amount of time that these girls spend to take care of these sick people?

Fiona : I also think it is wrong for them to spend time with those people, because when they start treating that person, they also get ... they also get emotional and that can sometimes lead for them not to concentrate on their school work, because now they will only just think about the person and ... so they will not concentrate on their school work ... the time that they must use for school work ...

Anneley: Uhm ... in what other ways can it influence their time that they should use for doing school work?

Joan : It might be that ... she might be ... the person might be the oldest child in the house ... and mostly in some traditions the girl has to take care of the sick ... now ... she's now the mother and the boys usually ... they just ... they don't take care of the person, they just rely on the girl to take care of the sick person.

Anneley: Okay, is there maybe anything else that you want to add?

Essie : I think it depends on the sort of family ... if they are supporting you during that period when that person is sick or is having HIV ... so if your family supports you I don't think it will affect you much.

Anneley: Okay, what ... in what way ... what do you mean by support?

Essie : Also helping you to take care of the person and giving you time to study.

Anneley: Okay, Vicky, do you want to add something?

Vicky : No Miss.

Anneley: Okay, thank you very much. Uhm ... do you think if a girl gets pregnant while

at school ... do you think that can have an influence on her academic performance?

Vicky : Yes Miss ... very much [the other girls are nodding].

Anneley: Okay, in what way?

Joan : She drops out of school during her period of pregnancy and when she is sometimes allowed to come and write the exams she is not gaining anything more while the other learners were at school, because she is at home.

Anneley: Uhm.

Joan : And usually she doesn't sometimes also come to write, because she just thinks what is the use of writing exams while she knows she was not at school.

Anneley: Okay, anything that you want to add? [to the other girls]

Fiona : Even if a school girl gets pregnant ... she won't concentrate so much on her school work, because she will just be in the class thinking of what's she's going to do with her baby or what the baby might eat or how her life will be in the future or ... now she has a baby and it will also influence her very much, because she might see her friends going out and she might feel pushed out and why didn't she have an abortion or something like that ...

Anneley: Uhm ... okay, uhm ... do you think it is a good thing that the Ministry now is allowing girls to come back to school after the first year of having a baby?

Girls : Yes!

Anneley: Okay ...

Fiona : It's sometimes good and sometimes bad.

Anneley: Okay, when is it good?

Fiona : I think it's good when they come back to school, because they ... now they have a baby and they can come back to school and have a further study to help themselves raising the child ... but I think it is bad on the other hand, because they only stay one year with the baby at home which means they won't have enough time to spend with the baby and that's not very good.

Anneley: Uhm-uhm ... anybody who wants to add something? [no response] Okay, now how do you think that girl will feel now ... who is having a child at home ... being in school with her friends ... other peers ... how do you think she-she feels about herself?

Fiona : I think she would feel very grown up, because now she has a baby ... she doesn't want to be told anything by her teachers at school ... now she's also a mother just like the other teacher and when the teacher says something she

talks back and she feels she's grown up.

Anneley: Okay, how do you feel she would feel amongst her friends?

Fiona : Very uncomfortable ...

Anneley: Very uncomfortable ... why?

Joan : Because when she comes back to school she might be ... when she sat back in the previous grade and her friends are in the next grade ... they mostly talk about what they did in class and she would feel left out, because she's in the other class and when she wants to talk to them they push her out and when she wants to talk ...

Fiona : Or mostly ... for instance ... maybe her friends talk about what they did last night ... they went out ... their mothers did this to them and now she will be like left out of the company, because she is got a baby and she doesn't do what her friends does anymore and now she just have to take care of the baby while her friends are maybe watching a movie and her mother might not also want to support her anymore, because she's got a baby while she is in school and now she has to be on her own. Maybe the baby's father is not there anymore.

Anneley: Now why do you think the mother will now not support her?

Fiona : Because she's got a baby while she still a young age and maybe her mother did everything she could to keep her in school and did everything for her now she has disappointed her by having a baby at an earlier stage ... now the mother has to look after her *and* the baby. The mother would also maybe feel very strange in between *her* friends, because now *her* friends ... they are talking about her children graduating now her child is sitting at home with a baby.

Anneley: Uhm-uhm ... Essie did you want to add something?

Essie : No Miss.

Anneley: Okay, now when I asked you if you think it is a good thing for the Ministry to allow these girls back to school ... you said sometimes it is good and sometimes it is not so good ... do you think anything positive can come out of this?

Girls : Yah, yes [all four].

Anneley: Like what?

Vicky : If you study too hard or maybe your mother talks to you ... give you advice ... you can become somebody in the future.

Fiona : And I also think it is a very good thing ... now she has the experience of being a parent and now she sees whether it's hard and whether it's easy for her in life ... that she would work very hard to achieve something.

Anneley: Okay, is there anything else that you want to add? Okay, now who do you think is responsible for getting girls pregnant?

Girls : Both of them [all four].

Anneley: Both of them ... now if you said both of them ... is it now a boy or a ...

Fiona : A man ...

Joan : Sugar daddies ...

Vicky : Sugar daddies as well ...

Anneley: Now what is a sugar daddy?

Joan : It's older ... when you ... dating older men ... they also date the other ones, but mostly they are sometimes responsible for teenage pregnancies ... or sometimes bigger boys.

Anneley: Uhm-uhm ... is it now bigger boys ...?

Joan : Elder ... older than ... maybe six or five years, seven years ...

Anneley: Okay, but is it now boys who are working or boys at school?

Joan : Some ... they are working.

Anneley: Okay.

Vicky : I think Miss ... sometimes it is the girls, cause girls are also after money of the guys.

Anneley: Uhm ... yah ... okay, so this is the sugar daddy story?

Vicky : Yah.

Fiona : But mostly the sugar daddy comes ... the sugar daddy story comes from your home ... maybe you live at home ... where you live at home may force you to have a sugar daddy ... maybe you want ... maybe you desire too much something and maybe your parents cannot afford, now you think about sugar daddies, because sugar daddies have money ... everything you want ...

Essie : I think it's mostly that girls ... they have been told a lot of times by their parents or by their mothers not to do things like that ... they see what is happening in life and the way they are suffering, but still they are bringing men closely ... most girls like doing that ... they like putting men in the situation that he also wants to be in and then she falls pregnant and then she blames it on the boy or man.

Anneley: Uhm.

Fiona : Okay, now ... and the fact that the girls has now been raped ... is it the boy or the girl's fault that she has been raped ...?

Essie : The boy's fault [the other two girls agree].

Joan : It also depends on a girl or maybe the girl might be sometimes harassing the guy and when you ... when you start reaching the moment that he want some sex, he just go to the girl, because ... for example she is maybe the one that attracting the sexual ...

Anneley: Okay, you said you think it's sometimes the girls ... when they get raped and sometimes it is the boys fault. Now, when I asked you ... I actually wanted to ask you whom do you think is impregnating girls ... is it elder men, is it boys still at school, is it their ... peers ... the same age ...

Fiona : Mostly men ... who are more experienced ... working and ...

Anneley: Working boys ... okay, now do you think ... say for instance the girl is at school and the boy is also at school ... do you think uhm ... who is blamed most of the time when a girl gets pregnant?

Essie : Girls ...

Fiona : The guy.

Anneley: The guy ... and do you think they act upon the guy ... they take action against the guy when it's a ...?

Fiona : Yah ... they do take action ... they do take action against the guy ... maybe the mother might take action against the guy ... mostly the mother can go and report the *guy* and now the guy can drop out of school. I also know someone who did that ... the girl is still at school.

Anneley: Is it ... okay.

Fiona : I don't think it's very fair, because both of them were involved ... in the same situation ... now the mother is ...

Joan : Only the boy who drops out of school.

Fiona : Yah ... I think both of them should drop out of school and the girl must also not come back while the boy is still out ... you know ... not back at the school, because both of them were involved.

Anneley: Uhm ... and what about if-if the girl is now out of school for that year ... what then about the boy ... how do you feel about the boy ... should the boy come back?

Fiona : No, he should not come back.

Essie : Both of them are responsible [all of them agree].

Fiona : Now he should also be at home ... taking care of the mother while she is having the baby for that whole year and then also they might ... can come back again to school.

Anneley: Okay.

Fiona : Yah, but if one drops out, both of them should drop out ... it's not fair to the girl ... it's not fair to the boy for the girl to come back at school and he still have to look for school in other way ... it will be very difficult for him.

Anneley: Okay, thank you very much girls.

[Bell rang for interval]

APPENDIX I

PILOT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

QUESTIONS:

1. What, in your view, is the ideal student like?
2. How far do you think you fit into this model?
3. Do you think being male or female makes a difference to the ideal student?
4. Do you think that being male or female makes a difference to your life generally in any way?
5. What are your favourite subjects at school?
Are these the ones you're good at?
6. What are your least favourite subjects at school?
Are these the ones you're worst at?
7. Do you think that male and female students have the same ability at different subjects?
If 'no', which subjects are involved and why?
8. Do you think certain subjects are meant for boys only?
If 'yes', which subjects are involved and why?
9. Do you think that boys are better at science and mathematics than girls?
10. Which gender is more vocal in class, male or female students, and why?
11. Can you say something about your learning style?
12. Are you planning to continue with further education?
13. Do you think that further education is important?
14. Do you get career guidance in the Life Skills class?
15. What job do you hope to do in the future?
16. Do you think it is important for girls to be independent and self-sufficient?
17. Do you think that teachers respond to boys and girls differently and why?
18. Do you think that boys are generally better at sport than girls and why?
19. What do you think about girls participating in extra-mural activities like soccer, rugby, cricket, golf, boxing and wrestling?

20. How about outside school, society more generally, do you think being a male or female student impacts on your life or makes a difference to your life in any way?

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