

Fall 2004

# Self-Esteem of the Female Adolescent: As Promoted Through the Life Skills Class

Kelsey Sullivan  
*SIT Study Abroad*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection)

 Part of the [Cognition and Perception Commons](#), and the [Cognitive Psychology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Sullivan, Kelsey, "Self-Esteem of the Female Adolescent: As Promoted Through the Life Skills Class" (2004). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 499.

[https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection/499](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/499)

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

SELF-ESTEEM OF THE FEMALE ADOLESCENT  
As Promoted Through the Life Skills Class  
Motherwell, Port Elizabeth, South Africa  
*A Qualitative Assessment*

Kelsey Sullivan  
Vidah Mayana, Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa  
School for International Training  
South Africa Public Health Program  
Fall 2004

## Table of Contents

Item:	Page:
Title Page	1
Table of Contents	2
Special Thanks	3
<b>Introduction</b>	4
<i>The Idea</i>	11
<i>The Shaping of an Independent Study Project</i>	13
Objectives	14
Methodology	16
<i>Interviews</i>	16
<i>Classroom Observation</i>	17
<i>Classroom Activities</i>	19
Overview of Findings	22
<b>The Adolescent Girl in the Life Skills Classroom</b>	23
Findings	23
<i>Level of Self-esteem</i>	24
<i>What is being done for Girls' Self-esteem?</i>	27
<i>Areas in which Self-esteem can be Affected Positively</i>	33
Problems with this Study	34
<b>Conclusions</b>	38
My Recommendations	39
Recommendations for Future Research	44
Closing Thoughts	48
Bibliography	49
Helpful Contacts	50
Appendix A	51
Appendix B	52
Appendix C	53
Appendix D	54
Appendix E	55

## **Special Thanks**

This research and project would not have been possible without the generosity and helpfulness of many people. I would like to thank Mrs. Mayana for her support throughout the development and execution of this project. I would also like to thank PPASA as well as LoveLife for their help and support. Zoleka, Too Short, and KoKo were all very kind to me as we worked together in the Life Skills classroom. Mrs. Dube and the community in Motherwell at Zanoxolo Primary School were also vital in helping me to gain access to the community and in allowing me to be a part of their community for three weeks. Thank you to the many individuals who helped me as well as the community as a whole for all of your assistance!

## Introduction

It is only in recent years that the study of self-esteem has become one of interest. Hitherto, people left the concept of self-esteem undefined, and rather clumped this concept with others such as attitude, personality, and relationships. Although self-esteem is intricately related to these concepts, it is also one that should stand on its own and receive the necessary recognition and attention that it needs as such an important idea. The research and exploration of self-esteem in recent years has become more appropriate to its necessity. Although there is still room for much more research, the advancement in attention is a good step.

The concept of self-esteem has been defined in various ways, mostly revolving around one's feelings towards oneself as an individual. *The Adolescent Experience* textbook defines self-esteem as “a sense of self-acceptance, a personal liking for one's self and respect for oneself.”<sup>1</sup> This functional definition highlights the regard towards oneself as well as the positivism in this regard. Both of these aspects are necessary for good self-esteem.

Research shows that development for females during the adolescent stage in particular is quite difficult.<sup>2</sup> The female experience with self-esteem is different than that of the male experience due to biological and psychological changes that take place during this developmental stage.<sup>3</sup> During adolescence, which is a key time for the development of self-esteem, females and males are having very different experiences, and these factors contribute to the difficulties that are present.

Adolescence is known to be an important time in development. Aminah Clark says

---

<sup>1</sup> Gullotta, Thomas P., *The Adolescent Experience*, Academic Press: San Diego, 1999, pg. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Knox, Michelle, “Adolescents' possible selves and their relationship to global self-esteem,” *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, July 1998, v39, pg. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Clark, Aminah, *How to Raise Teenagers' Self-Esteem*, Price Stern Sloan: Los Angeles, 1990, pg. 14.

that “adolescence is one of the most critical periods in life in terms of developing self-esteem.”<sup>4</sup> Erik Ericson also agrees that adolescence is an important phase in development because individuals are developing an identity. One’s self-esteem during this time greatly contributes to one’s sense of identity.<sup>5</sup> Both the gender and age distinction are important because this combination contributes to the difficulty of experience during this period of development.

So what are we doing for our girls? Because self-esteem has only recently been specifically identified as a problem during adolescence, there is not much that is being done to help girls develop self-esteem. There are, however, many resources that can help this problem. Parents, families, friends, the media, and schools all play a large role in the adolescent girls’ self-regard. Through these bountiful resources then, adolescent girls’ self-esteem can definitely be positively affected. Schools in particular have both the necessary resources and access to girls on a regular basis that they can make a huge difference in the betterment of adolescent girls’ self-esteem.

The public school system in America, like that of South Africa, claims that all children must go to school. The South Africa Schools act says that every public (government) school “Must admit learners and serve their education requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way.”<sup>6</sup> In both of these countries, then, most girls will be attending school for a large part of their adolescent years. The effect of positive endorsement of self-esteem for these girls through schooling could be enormous.

Right now, however, schooling is often misdirected in its effect on girls.

While there are many opportunities to steer girls in the right direction, girls are often

---

<sup>4</sup> Clark, Aminah, *How to Raise Teenagers’ Self-Esteem*, Price Stern Sloan: Los Angeles, 1990, pg. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Clark, Aminah, *How to Raise Teenagers’ Self-Esteem*, Price Stern Sloan: Los Angeles, 1990, pg. 14.

<sup>6</sup> A M Education Consultants, *Life Skills Manual for Primary School*, Department of Health in South Africa, 1999, pg. 105.

left to fend for themselves with curriculums that are male-focused and taught in a male-focused environment. In *How School's Shortchange Girls*, the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (AAUW) describes the circumstances in which girls are side-lined and boys take the front seat in educational dynamics having to do with curriculum. "Research spanning the last twenty years consistently reveals that males receive more teacher attention than do females. There is also a tendency for schools to choose curricular materials that will appeal more to boys' interests."<sup>7</sup>

The importance of curriculum is tremendous. This is the main method of learning about the world for students, and the world view that a given student will develop depends on what he or she is taught. Although formal subjects are often the same across school curriculums, the content of the material taught in those subject areas is object for negotiation and specification. Through these possible distinctions one can create a curriculum that will more directly address the needs and lives of one's specific student group. If specification is not taken into consideration, one may spend their entire childhood in school and never learn anything that is applicable for him or her. For example, a twelfth-grade African American girl in urban New York described her educational experience as a part of the AAUW report during 1991 by saying, "In twelve years of school, I never studied anything about myself."<sup>8</sup> The reality of the situation is that this is not infrequently the case.

Because of experiences like this one, curriculum can have negative effects on one's level of self-esteem. Curriculum is labeled by the AAUW as the "central

---

<sup>7</sup> American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Marlowe & Company: New York, 1992, pg. 103-104.

<sup>8</sup> American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Marlowe & Company: New York, 1992, pg. 105.

message-giving instrument of the school.”<sup>9</sup> It is also clear that the negative effect of curriculum has much to do with the fact that women appear less frequently in history books and even in the public sphere today, sending out the message that women are less important and less capable than men. This message delivered through school makes the severity that much worse, and girls are then forced to believe it has some validity.

The AAUW also did research on the feedback that is given with in classrooms. It has been consistently found that male students are given more feedback than female students. It is said that “careful and comprehensive teacher reactions not only affect student learning, they can also influence student self-esteem.”<sup>10</sup> Boys are generally encouraged more than girls, and are also reprimanded less for doing the same unruly behavior. Even at a young age, like in preschool, boys are given more positive feedback through more hugs and positive language.<sup>11</sup> These clear discrepancies of treatment of boys and girls send negative messages to girls, and therefore do not create a good environment for the growth of self-esteem for girls. They view themselves as less important than boys, and this continues the cycle of power dynamics that keep girls with lower self-esteem than boys, leading to a cycle of less successful lifestyles.

It is important to also consider the idea of power dynamics when looking at self-esteem. The International Conference of Population and Development summary of notes says that “Power relationships operate from the most personal to the highly

---

<sup>9</sup> American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Marlowe & Company: New York, 1992, pg. 117.

<sup>10</sup> American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Marlowe & Company: New York, 1992, pg. 119.

<sup>11</sup> American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Marlowe & Company: New York, 1992, pg. 118.



public levels, impeding women's attainment of healthy and fulfilling lives."<sup>12</sup>

Although in the United States women are slowly gaining more rights and recognition as individuals equal to men, there are many places in the world where this movement has not even begun. And, despite the struggle for equal rights, even in the United States women still earn less than men, hold fewer high working positions, and are often still revered as belonging in the home and with children. In South Africa women most definitely have less power than men.

Along the line of power dynamics, the AAUW also lays out the inequalities that are faced by adolescent girls in American society at large, and here regards the school as a mechanism of change. "Marriage, family, and employment outside the home are not equal situations for women and men in our society. Teenage girls know this. It is a discouraging reality, a reality that schools alone cannot change, but one that will not change until schooling changes."<sup>13</sup> Although this is clearly a culturally sensitive issue, all cultures face gender dynamics and the development of gender roles as a part of the reality in which they live. The International Conference on Population and Development said in their conference summary in 1994 that "Women are generally the poorest of the poor, despite their central role as key agents of the development process."<sup>14</sup> It is clear that women live with disadvantage in many parts of the world. These realities are brought forth in the public school setting because public schools are accessed by members of that given culture.

This dynamic affects adolescents and their self-esteem. Because girls know that the world sees them as inferior, their motivation is less, and their goals are lower

---

<sup>12</sup> Alcala, Maria Jose, Action for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Reproductive Health & Rights for All, Smart Design Inc.: New York, 1994, pg. 2.

<sup>13</sup> American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Marlowe & Company: New York, 1992, pg. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Alcala, Maria Jose, Action for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Reproductive Health & Rights for All, Smart Design Inc.: New York, 1994, pg. 2.

than that of boys. Girls with lower self-esteem and less perceived power are also more likely to engage in unwanted or risky sexual relationships. This has a great effect on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and high rates of sexually transmitted infections and HIV in young women, especially those living in poverty.<sup>15</sup>

Teenagers are also in a difficult stage in their relationships with their parents and adult figures in their lives. Parents often have issues relating to their teenage child, and vice versa. Teenagers feel that they are not truly listened to, and that parents do not understand them.<sup>16</sup> Although this is sometimes just a communication gap, it is also a reality for many teens and his/her parents. Because of this communication gap, the role of the school and teachers become even more crucial.

There are many factors in one's experience at school that can contribute to good self-esteem. Teachers, peer relations, classes, administrative attitudes, and class instruction are all a part of the effect that schools can have on girls. While all of these factors, especially that of peer relations, can not be specifically controlled, there is room for manipulation. Self-esteem enhancement is a combination of all factors.

Power is something that can be given to girls through knowledge and positive self-image. With better confidence and knowledge girls are empowered to make their own decisions about where they stand in the world. They are also more likely to stand up to individuals that try to make them feel like they are inferior. These girls are also more likely to take risks and set high goals. They are more likely to achieve their goals because they have been given the ability to believe in themselves as individuals with potential.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Kalichman, Seth C., *Preventing AIDS*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Mahwah, New Jersey, 1998, pg. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Clark, Aminah, *How to Raise Teenagers' Self-Esteem*, Price Stern Sloan: Los Angeles, 1990, pg. 79-80.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, Aminah, *How to Raise Teenagers' Self-Esteem*, Price Stern Sloan: Los Angeles, 1990, pg. 29-30.

Teachers are a great resource for self-esteem enhancement. Through their attitudes towards girls in their classroom, their behavior in feedback to the classroom, and the way in which they explain material, they can have a large positive effect on girls' self-image. Teachers are role models whether they view themselves that way or not. And, aside from parents, they are likely to be one of the main adults in a child's life.

A teacher becomes not only a key role model in the lives of his/her students, but can also serve as a parental figure when teenagers may need that example most of all. When adolescents are having parental issues, the teacher may become the main adult in that child's life. The teacher's role in the promotion of self-esteem is one of great importance and can have a large impact on the lives of teenagers. Teachers should take advantage of this role and make a difference in their students' self-esteem.<sup>18</sup>

Teachers can also have a positive affect on girls through their curriculum choice and implementation. By using material that shows girls as equals to boys, as well as by delivering the material in a way that is receptive for both girls and boys they will help girls to have increased self-esteem. Curriculums that are girl-friendly will have both female and male figures as representatives of history and current power holders. This concept goes back to that of role models. Adolescents are very role-model conscious and through the use of positive examples girls will be better able to set goals for themselves and will see themselves as having potential.<sup>19</sup> The implementation of curriculum is more than just the teacher as a role model. This requires that the teacher engage both girls and boys in the delivery of material, and that the classroom has a positive energy and guidelines for equal learning. These

---

<sup>18</sup> Clark, Aminah, *How to Raise Teenagers' Self-Esteem*, Price Stern Sloan: Los Angeles, 1990, pg. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, Aminah, *How to Raise Teenagers' Self-Esteem*, Price Stern Sloan: Los Angeles, 1990, pg. 65.

guidelines should be set at the beginning of a class so that the standards for the learning atmosphere are known by the whole class for the entire learning experience.

Schools have the opportunity to be a mechanism for positive change in girls' self-esteem. When the International Conference of Population and Development met in September of 1994 they saw the school an important part of changing the lives of women around the world. When referencing male attitudes towards women they said that "Schools should ensure that attitudes respectful of women are instilled in boys from the earliest possible age."<sup>20</sup> Although this is just one responsibility of a school in changing girls' self-esteem, it is an important step.

The recognition of schools as a positive force of change by the Conference is important in the roles of schools everywhere. Though they did just mention one attitude change, they opened the door for the role and responsibilities of schools to be re-evaluated and to have that role expand and the level of responsibility increase.

Through this recognition it seems that schools have a lot of work to do. I began to wonder, though, what was actually taking place in the classroom here in South Africa. Did this literature that was mainly American centered apply to South African schools? How does this fit into the cultural context of schools here?

### *The Idea:*

In a culture that often sees women as secondary and inferior to men, there needs to be a way to lift up girls and empower them to be self-sufficient and to make their own decisions. Girls need to know that they are just as important as men, that their opinions matter, and that they have the same rights as men do.

---

<sup>20</sup> Alcala, Maria Jose, Action for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Reproductive Health & Rights for All, Smart Design Inc.: New York, 1994, pg. 4.

Self-esteem is the key to making the women in this country healthier, more successful, and inevitably more happy and satisfied with life. The empowerment of women will allow girls to live for more than raising a family, and will help to make girls stronger which will in turn allow them to stand up to peer pressure and make healthy decisions.

There are many issues in South African society today including the extreme levels of poverty, HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, rape, and unemployment. These issues affect girls every day in their lives. Women and girls need to know their rights and be strong to stand up to peer pressure as well as have aspirations and dreams that allow them to see beyond their present situations.

It seems though, that there are many examples of strong women in South Africa, and in particular the community of Port Elizabeth. Whether it is women in charge of businesses, Mamas in the home, or teachers in the classroom, there are women who are empowered and have high self-esteem. Many of these women, though empowered, also partake in the cultural ways of life that make women subordinate to men. They cook, they clean, and they listen whenever men speak.

Participating in cultural ways is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does make me question the messages that are being given to girls today in this society. Adolescent girls are very role-model conscious, and often do as they see being done, so the ways that strong women behave is very important.

It also seems that there are things being done to help girls' self-esteem, which makes me wonder why there is no change? Why do girls still give into peer pressure and why are they serving men like it is their purpose here on this earth? What does this mean for the health of the women of South Africa?

*The Shaping of an Independent Study Project:*

In three months here studying health I have come to realize that I think there are two main kinds of health care. There is preventative health care, and there is curative health care. After I admitted to myself that I do not like hospitals or even going to the doctor for that matter, it solidified my support of preventative health. Through knowledge, education, and changing peoples' mindsets and attitudes towards health, a huge difference can be made. With AIDS for example, which is currently incurable, it seems that the best way to fix this problem is to prevent AIDS, rather than try and sustain a quality of life after infected. Now, I also believe that helping people who are sick is very important, but I think that preventative medicine is going to be the best solution in the AIDS epidemic as well as the other health problems that plague this nation.

I will admit that I have wanted to work with adolescent girls since long before I even arrived in South Africa, but I was never really sure exactly how. I thought that when I got here and saw first hand the lives that girls lead and the issues they face, that I would be able to better construct how I would research girls in this context.

All of these factors led me to the classroom. In a space where health prevention through education, necessary role models, and consistent access to girls are all possible, the classroom can give the chance to succeed. I knew that it is an area I know well, and that I would be comfortable to assess the present situation.

I wanted to get inside the schools and see what was actually being done in the classroom with girls and boys and teachers all together. I wanted to see what was being taught, to whom, how was it being taught, and how was it being received. I knew that I would feel comfortable in a classroom because I have spent most of my

life there and I want to continue to be a classroom for the rest of my life. I knew that I would be able to fit into the classroom well and that assessing the current situation would be the only way to get some answers to some of the questions that I have had while studying health here in South Africa.

**Objectives:**

I want to explore the level and concept of “self-esteem” in the female adolescent population in the Port Elizabeth area, and see how the Life Skills course that is offered in the Public School system helps to promote enhanced “self-esteem” and betterment of self-concept in this population through its focus on health and health related topics. I will be working specifically with students from Motherwell, at Zanoxolo Primary school. Although I will be working with both boys and girls in the classroom, I will be focusing on the girls specifically when doing my research and write-up.

I hope to see how teaching material, teaching methods, school environment, parental involvement, and other such factors apply to the self-esteem situation of the female adolescent population. I expect that through my contact and working with these girls my ideas will expand and I should be able to more clearly specify factors and aspects of the adolescent experience. The three main objectives of this study were to see the level of self-esteem in girls in the Motherwell area, to see what is being done in the classroom to enhance girls’ self-esteem, and to find areas where there could be more done to help the self-esteem of girls or at least to study how that could be accomplished.

This study is an introductory study on which I will hopefully be able to follow up later in my life. There are many aspects of self-esteem, of girls in South Africa, and of schools here in South Africa, that need to be addressed more directly, but this study rather looks at the combination of the three in a broad manner. This broad study is necessary because there being so little research on this subject in general; it is not yet clear how to do a specific study because the need areas are yet to be identified. I hoped to be able to identify some of these areas through this study and enable other research to continue at a future time.

The self-esteem of the girls in the Motherwell area needed to be assessed in order to see if the idea of self-esteem is even a problem here. I also wanted to see how it is a problem therefore giving me an understanding of how to make things better further down the line.

The evaluation of what is being done in the classroom is important because although there have been programs created for the classroom, including specific curriculum, it is not clear that they are being implemented. Or, if they are being implemented, it is not clear that the affect of these programs is the intended affect for girls.

The third intent of my research was to identify areas and ways in which girls' self-esteem could be enhanced in the given environment. I hoped that through this evaluation I may be able to find ways to specifically make programs or delivery of programs better for girls.

The overall intent of this study was to spend time with girls in their environment and see how they function, how they appear to feel about themselves, and how they act in the classroom setting. This also allowed me to see teachers in



action as well as an organization (LoveLife) in action in the classroom which added to the general experience.

### **Methodology:**

There were three main ways in which I conducted my research for this project. These methods include interviews, classroom observation, and classroom activities.

#### *Interviews:*

Adult interviews were conducted in half-hour periods with three teachers, a LoveLife Groundbreaker, and a PPASA worker, each done individually and guided by specific interview questions that were the same for each individual<sup>21</sup>. Although the guiding questions were the same, there were some questions that were based on the flow of the interview, so each interview was not exactly the same.

Interviews with teachers at Zanoxolo Primary School were conducted during break time, after my class observation for the day, so that teachers would be available and most compliant with my request for some of their time. The interviews with the LoveLife worker as well as the PPASA worker were arranged separately because they did not need to be conducted in accordance with the school schedule.

The interview with students was one session that lasted approximately one hour. There were five students in this session and we met as a whole group for one session. The questions for the students were different from the educator questions<sup>22</sup>. When questions were asked in this interview they were directed at the group rather

---

<sup>21</sup> Please see Appendix A for Educator Interview Questions

<sup>22</sup> Please see Appendix B for Student Interview Questions

than individuals, although there was prompting for individual participation if certain individuals were not involved or seemed to not be answering questions.

The student interview was also conducted during the break time of the school day. This meant that students did not have to miss any classes, and they were willing to give up part of their break in order to meet with me of which I was, and am very appreciative.

For all of the interviews the participants were asked if it was okay for notes to be taken. The participants were also made aware of the purpose of the interview as a part of my general study of which they were also made aware. Although specific details were not given, they were given the general idea of the study and were alerted of the reason for my visit to the schools.

#### *Classroom Observation:*

The classroom observation was done in Zanoxolo Primary School in Motherwell, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. There were seven observation days in the classroom.

#### Classroom Observation Schedule

Day	Date	Classes seen
1	09-Nov	7A, 7C
2	10-Nov	7D, 7B
3	11-Nov	7A, 7C
4	16-Nov	7A, 7B
5	17-Nov	7A, 7B

6	18-Nov	7C, 7D
7	23-Nov	7A, 7C

The schedule above is the schedule that I followed for my classroom observation in Zanoxolo. Day represents the day of my observation, Date is the actual date that I was in the classroom, and Classes seen is the two different classes that I saw that day. The seventh grade in Zanoxolo is broken up into 7A, 7B, 7C, and 7D, all of which I saw at different times during my observation as according to their class schedule.

My actual class observation was done with three representatives of LoveLife. The classes that I observed were conducted by a LoveLife Staff member, a Groundbreaker, and a Binchee, all of whom are based at the Motherwell Y center as a part of the LoveLife program.

My work with the LoveLife members was developed through Mrs. Mayana, a PPASA executive in Port Elizabeth who is ultimately responsible for the LoveLife programs in the area of the Eastern Cape. Mrs. Mayana helped to connect me with the LoveLife workers. The LoveLife workers and I then went to Zanoxolo and met with Mrs. Dube, the Health Educator in charge, in order to set up a schedule for my class observation. After coordinating all of our schedules in regards to the allocated ISP research time, as well as working with Mr. Ponase, who so graciously let us use his class periods for three weeks during the Life Orientation period, we were able to set up the seven days for classroom observation.

When the proposed schedule was set up I also met with the Principal of Zanoxolo Primary school in order to get her approval for my presence in the classroom. I also submitted two finished copies of my project proposal to Mrs. Dube for her own use as well as distribution to the School Board at their weekly meeting so

they would know my intentions and would be able to approve my observation time and presence in the school. I also submitted a letter of intention for the School Board and Mrs. Dube to keep on record while I was in attendance at school.<sup>23</sup>

My classroom observation was done with the seventh graders in Life Skills classes during the Life Orientation period. Although it was Mr. Ponase's class, the classes were conducted by the LoveLife workers rather than Mr. Ponase himself. The class material was chosen from the LoveLife Groundbreaker teaching manual and was chosen by the Groundbreaker with whom I was working. The classes were taught in a rotating fashion so that each class group (meaning 7A, 7B, 7C, and 7D) all received the same class lessons. This also meant that I got to see the same material being taught four times, which was helpful in my observation because I became very familiar with the material and able to focus on whatever I needed to focus.

During the first four class periods in which we were present the LoveLife workers and I introduced ourselves and talked a little bit about our presence in the classroom. The LoveLife workers did their own normal introductions and talked about their program while I introduced myself as a Health student at the University of Port Elizabeth who wanted to see how their Life Skills class functioned. The students were very receptive to our presence on that day as well as all of the following days in which we were in the classroom.

#### *Classroom Activities:*

The classroom activities were designed by me in accordance with my literature review, as well as my classroom observation and evaluation of the Life

---

<sup>23</sup> Please see Appendix C for letter of intention.

Skills materials of PPASA, LoveLife, and the Life Orientation curriculum. I designed these activities in order to get a qualitative assessment with classroom participation of the girls' self-esteem. I wanted to see what kinds of words they used, the way in which they responded to my proposed activities, and the way that they followed through with participation.

The activities took place on November 24, 2004, and November 25, 2004. One activity was done on each day. They were done in the same classroom in which I did my classroom observation. The students that participated in the activity were a mix of the four seventh grade classes in which I had been observing for the last three weeks. The students knew me, which was a good thing, because they trusted and knew my presence in their classroom.

The format of the activity classes was shaped greatly by the fact that the students were not having other classes at that time because it was the end of the school year was. Although this format was not the anticipated format, it worked out nonetheless because the students that were present in the classroom were a random selection.

The approval of the classroom activities was done in tandem with the approval of the classroom observation done by Mrs. Dube, the Principal of Zanoxolo Primary, as well as the School Board.

I was in charge of the classroom activities although the LoveLife Groundbreaker and LoveLife Binchee were present and did, at times, help with the implementation of the activities. They also helped to translate when either my Xhosa failed me, or the students had a question that could have been better clarified in Xhosa.

Specific details of classroom activities:

### Activity 1: Self-Perception Body-Mapping

The body-mapping I facilitated is different from that which is normally used in participatory research. Students drew large pictures of themselves, and created a self-portrait using the given materials of a large sheet of paper and markers to tell the group who they are. I hoped that through this activity I would be able to assess the level of self-esteem within a representative group of the area, as well as learn more about the students and their sense of self-concept. Though this is not a quantitative method of research, it is okay because my topic is of a qualitative nature rather than quantitative. Through the word choice on the diagrams, as well as the pictures themselves, I would be able to have a good understanding of how these students see themselves<sup>24</sup>.

### Activity 2: Goal Definition

The second activity that I facilitated was goal definition. I wanted to learn about the students' goals and dreams in life. This, again, is a qualitative review of the students' own ideas of what they are capable, and allowed me to again learn more about the students as well as their life plans. I had each student write down five goals, five dreams, where they want to be in five years, where they think they will be in five years, and where they want to be in ten years, and where they think they will be in ten years. By 'where they will be' I mean the phase of their life, where they will be living, with whom they will be living, and what their plans are. This exercise, though clearly

---

<sup>24</sup> Please see Appendix D for Body Mapping Instructions for the specific instructions used by the facilitator for the classroom activity.

beneficial to me, was also beneficial for the students because it made them think about their goals/dreams and futures. It is also good because it helped to put the idea in their head that they should think about their futures and that they have something to look forward to beyond tomorrow<sup>25</sup>.

Though both the goal definition and body mapping exercise were done for my evaluative purposes, I also made a point to involve a small lesson through the activity. On the day of goal definition, before filling out the goal sheet, we had a class discussion where we talked about goals and the importance of goals in life. I also, after completion of the goal sheet, had each student stand up and say a goal that he/she had and what he/she was doing right now to achieve that goal. On the body mapping day I had students present their body maps, if willing, to the class to show the other students what they like about themselves. Through these participatory methods I was able to give something back to the students which I think is very important, because I was not just taking from the students, but was able to give to them as well.

### **Overview of Findings:**

Self-esteem in the public school context of the Life Skills curriculum in the Life Orientation learning area turned out to be quite an interesting study. Although this study has left me with many more questions to be asked and answered, as well as a great deal of other research ideas rather than answers themselves, I find that in the end that is probably more valuable than a set of answers. The students and teachers

---

<sup>25</sup> Please see Appendix E for Goal Definition Sheet that was used during the facilitation of the Goal Exercise.

with whom I worked were very compliant and helpful, and I was impressed with the discipline of the classroom and the detail of the teaching material in the teaching manuals.

The self-esteem of the girls with whom I worked was better than I would have guessed. Though there were still many girls who did not have great self-esteem, there were a number of girls who were quite confident and empowered, and there were more out-going girls than I would have expected.

It also seems that there are programs being done to help girls. LoveLife is a great example of one of these programs, because they have empowering teaching material and they deliver this material in a very adolescent friendly manner. The department of education, is, as well, on board to make a change in self-esteem of girls and this can be seen through the new initiatives in the education curriculum.

I also found, though, that there is so much room for improvement. The school is such a wonderful resource when trying to reach girls and make them have better self-esteem, and there is really a lot more that can and should be done in this area.

This turned out to be a very informative study, although not in the ways that I had wanted or thought it would go, but in ways that will help to guide further research and future questions to explore.

## **The Adolescent Girl in the Life Skills Classroom**

### **Findings:**

My findings have, like the overview of findings, been split into three separate categories which address the level of girls' self-esteem, what is being done in the



classroom in regards to self-esteem, and areas in which or ways in which self-esteem of girls can be enhanced or affected positively. Although some of the details will overlap, the separation allows for better attention to detail in each of the separate areas. This will be helpful when later trying to make more use of this study for future studies.

### *Level of Self-Esteem:*

The adolescent girls in seventh grade at Zanoxolo Primary School in Motherwell, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, were quite diverse in their level of self-esteem. No matter what class group, there was a mix of girls with high self-esteem and those who did not appear to have high self-esteem. I also found that there was quite a discrepancy from what the teachers and learners thought about the level of self-esteem and what I actually saw when I was in the classroom.

Both teachers and learners said that some girls in the area had high self-esteem. While the learners actually seemed to have more faith in the level of self-esteem than the teachers did, one of the teachers said that students had a “Very positive self-esteem, they show a willingness.”<sup>26</sup> The other teachers did not think as much of the level of girls’ self-esteem saying that “They are not sure about themselves,”<sup>27</sup> and “Some are confident, some are shy, depends on their background.”<sup>28</sup> A LoveLife worker said that adolescents in Motherwell are “Not confident enough, but have confidence.”<sup>29</sup> The students agreed that some could have more confidence, but were adamant that many did have self-esteem.

---

<sup>26</sup> Mrs. Dube, personal communication, 24 November 2004, Motherwell.

<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Lukwe, personal communication, 16 November 2004, Motherwell.

<sup>28</sup> Mr. Ponase, personal communication, 10 November 2004, Motherwell.

<sup>29</sup> Mr. Too Short, personal communication, 25 November 2004, Motherwell.

The learners themselves that I spoke with in a group interview session specifically praised their own self-esteem. When asked if they thought they had self-esteem one girl said “I like my self-esteem because it’s high, I have confidence in me.”<sup>30</sup> Another girl said “When I do something others say its wrong but I know its right.”<sup>31</sup>

These students are very representative of those with high self-esteem in the area. They seem empowered, confident, and they know that they are so. It is the other group, those that are shy and less confident, that I did not hear from in the interview or in the classroom. Though there are students that are confident, there were also many students that were not confident.

While observing the classes I found that in general the same students answered questions and participated in class discussions. Although there was some effort on the part of the teacher to engage other students, most students were able to get by just listening rather than participating in class. The confident students did not seem malicious in their occupying most of the class discussion time, but seemed rather to fill the alternative void of students answering questions.

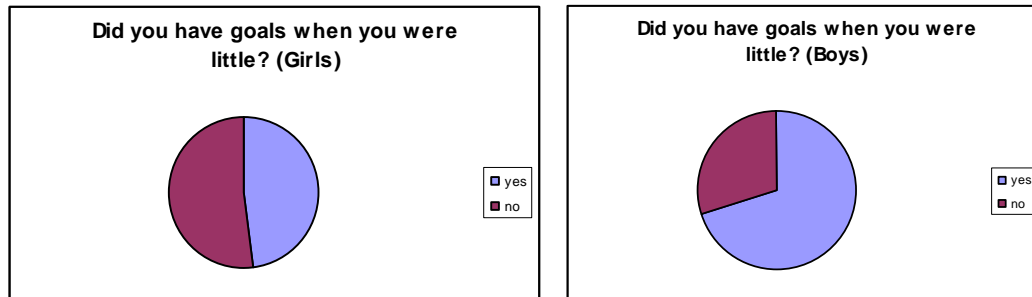
I did not see a large discrepancy between the participation between girls and boys. Although boys did participate more frequently than girls, it was not as large a difference as I had thought there may be. There seemed to be many boys that were shy as well as girls. I did notice that there were more boys that spoke than girls, and that although girls made up a good percentage of the participation, it was usually a very small number of girls, while the boys’ participation was more spread out amongst the male population.

---

<sup>30</sup> Student Group Interview, personal communication, 18 November 2004, Motherwell.

<sup>31</sup> Student Group Interview, personal communication, 18 November 2004, Motherwell.

When assessing the goal activity sheet it was interesting to see how many girls did not appear to have goals when they were younger. While four boys out of the 13 male participants said that they did not have goals when they were younger, 11 girls out of the 21 female participants said they didn't have goals.



As can be seen above, a much larger percentage of boys had goals when they were little as compared with the girls. This is significant because goals are the foundation of success. It is important to have goals because one must be motivated to do well and live healthily now in order to someday achieve those goals. Without goals there is no direction and therefore one would be more likely to participate in risky behaviors such as sex at an early age<sup>32</sup>.

I was disappointed that so many girls said they did not have dreams when they were little, but I was excited that so many girls had the same goals now as those of boys. Many listed wanting to become a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a nurse, a police officer, as well as an actress, a singer, and a hairdresser. When I asked the students what they were doing now to achieve their goals many answered with "I am going to work hard and finish my studies," is a very positive step in the right direction.

---

<sup>32</sup> LoveLife, *LoveLife Body Y's Teaching Manual*, South Africa: Planned Parenthood Association, 2004, pg. 122.

Although most of the responses were simplistic and not inspiring, there were some that got me really excited. Some of the girls, when asked about their futures, said that they do think about it and even said how important they think it is to look to the future. One twelve year old girl said “I think that I have to finish at school first so that I will be the teacher or everything I want to be.” Another twelve year old girl said “I think that future is the most important thing in your whole entire life because a future can make you someone/something tomorrow.”

The same girl who responded above also said that in ten years she might be a “lawyer so that I can help other people like raped women so that we can deal with this problem men raping women of hurting other people even everyone.”<sup>33</sup> I think that responses like this one give hope to the situation of self-esteem girls. They are willing to look to the future and see that there can be good times for them ahead.

While overall the self-esteem of the girls in the classes that I observed did not appear to be extremely high, there were some girls that were clearly confident. There is definitely room for improvement in the self-esteem of the girls at Zanoxolo Primary School.

### *What is being done for the girls' self-esteem?*

There is a lot that is being done for girls' self-esteem right now in Motherwell. Although much of this has to do with LoveLife rather than the school itself, it is still reassuring of the future of girls.

LoveLife has created a program for the teaching Life Skills to students during the Life Orientation subject period in school that is very relevant for students. The

---

<sup>33</sup> Goal Definition sheet activity

material is wholly applicable to their lives, which is very important in their retention of the information, as well as much more interesting for the students.

The program itself as defined through the teaching manual is focused on healthy sexuality, but also addresses self-esteem, motivation, body concept, and peer pressure. All of these topics are based on the concept of a healthy mindset, meaning a good self-esteem, and grow from that idea. The first subject in the PPASA Life Skills teaching manual, from which the LoveLife teaching manual was created, is self-esteem. This module addresses the necessity of a good self-esteem in living a healthy lifestyle. This topic is “First and will {be} reinforced at the beginning of every year because healthy self-esteem and a realistic self-concept are essential foundations for all the other topics in the course. We want young people to be confident and motivated...”<sup>34</sup> It is clear that PPASA understands the need to teach about self-esteem right at the beginning of the class, and by placing this subject first it is highlighted as a priority.

Material as such is wonderful because it is so applicable to the students in the community where it is being taught. When learning material that is so relevant students are much more willing to learn and will also learn the material better.<sup>35</sup> The subject matter is also equally relevant in the lives of both boys and girls. While it does not specifically target girls in any way, the equal presentation is enhancing for the girls self-esteem. The curriculum of this program seemed to be self-esteem enhancing as well because it not only addressed that topic directly, but also uses self-esteem as the foundation for living a positive and healthy lifestyle. The material is both factual and comprehensive which enables students to make life choices that are informed.

---

<sup>34</sup> Norton, J., Dawson, C., *Life Skills & HIV/AIDS Education*, South Africa: Planned Parenthood Association, 1999, pg. 1.

<sup>35</sup> American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Marlowe & Company: New York, 1992.

The design of the delivery of the LoveLife program in schools is also quite impressive. Having young people, Groundbreakers and Binchees, teach students appears very effective because students are willing to listen and are very engaged in learning in the classroom. In a culture where talking with adults about sex and sexuality is often seen as a taboo<sup>36</sup> it is wonderful to have peers as a resource when learning about said subjects. The Groundbreakers and Binchees are also energetic and enthusiastic about their information, so the delivery is enticing to students and helps to make the information more available.

The problem that I found with the program as implemented in schools was the lack of the implementation of what is actually in the teaching manual. I think that a large part of the reason for this is that the teaching style in South African schools is less student-involved than it should be. The discrepancy between the teaching manual and what actually went on in the classroom was immense. The teaching manual describes lessons that involve students in group discussion, class activities, and large class discussions.<sup>37</sup> In the classes that I observed there were two times when the class was split into groups for discussions, and there was only one activity involving the material being presented.

I would like to praise LoveLife for their use of “Ice Breakers,” which are class activities that get students focused and excited to learn, because these were very effective in making students focused as well as ready to learn. The variety of the Ice Breakers and the activities themselves were engaging for students and stimulating for the brain. The students seemed very fond of these activities, and they clearly loved being active in the classroom.

---

<sup>36</sup> Mr. Too Short, personal communication, 25 November 2004, Motherwell.

<sup>37</sup> Norton, J., Dawson, C., *Life Skills & HIV/AIDS Education*, South Africa: Planned Parenthood Association, 1999.

The learning of the actual material, however, was not done in such an active fashion. Where the teachers could have engaged the students in the same way when teaching the lesson as they had during the Ice Breakers they really missed out by lecturing rather than engaging.

It seems, though, that the South African teaching method is to teach facts and have students regurgitate information rather than involve students in creative thinking and the learning process. This teaching method has proven to be less effective in making students think and really learn material. While students may be able to retain information and spit out the words they have learned on an exam or if they are questioned in class, they are not really learning the information for themselves. The actual description of Outcomes Based Education (OBE), which is the program through which Life Orientation is to be taught, says “Tell me, and I’ll forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I’ll understand.”<sup>38</sup> This concept is a great one that follows along the idea of creative learning. I did not see this idea being implemented in the classroom.

Critical thinking, which asks students to solve problems by thinking through what tools they will need to solve the given problem and then seeking help when they do not have the tools they may need, does not take place in the classroom.<sup>39</sup> Students are not pushed to engage their brains at a higher level than memorization because they are not made to think at a deep level. Critical thinking is a way of involving the students in the learning because they are made to process material and see how it may be applicable to their lives, as well as how it can help them in their lives. This involvement is the goal of the OBE program.

---

<sup>38</sup> A M Education Consultants, *Life Skills Manual for Primary School*, Department of Health in South Africa, 1999, pg. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Critical Thinking website, <http://www.austhink.org>, accessed on 30 November 2004.

Learners of Life Skills material could greatly benefit from the actual implementation of the Outcomes Based Education program. The learners would not only better learn the material, but the learning could affect a great positive change in the mentality of learners about positive sexuality and healthy lifestyles in general. Through their involvement students would internalise the material, allowing them to retain it for a longer period of time, and also apply it on a more regular basis. The programs are readily available and right there in the manual, and implementing this material through the OBE program is necessary in teaching classes like Life Orientation.

On another note, the classroom did seem like a place where both girls and boys had a good opportunity to learn. There did not appear to be any discrimination between the two, and the involvement of the two was based more on their own initiative rather than the prompting of a teacher. Girls and boys were also equally praised for their participation and both genders seemed to respond well to the praise.

However, there was not really an extra effort made to engage those who were not involved in the class discussion. Although it is not the responsibility of the teacher necessarily to involve students, there should be an effort made to engage students that appear to be shy or uninvolved. Often there are other reasons aside from a lack of knowledge that make students stay shy in the classroom, and when they are not encouraged to participate they will not do so on their own. Because there are so many girls who did not involve themselves in the class discussions, it would be a good move on the part of the teacher to try and involve more females.

Teachers, however, do seem to understand the importance of their responsibility as role models for students. All of the teachers I spoke with addressed the topic with sincerity and clearly cared deeply about their ability to impact the lives



of the students. One teacher said that she is a “Role model for the students. They see how I do things.”<sup>40</sup> A LoveLife Groundbreaker said that the students “Do as I do, not as I say, so I do positive things.”<sup>41</sup> These views seem to be representative of the teachers at Zanoxolo. Teacher attitudes are wonderful and definitely set up the opportunity for helping girls’ self-esteem.

The teachers also take it on themselves to guide the students. They described their job beyond just being a role model as to motivate students, look out for their general well-being, support students, and guide them to be positive members of the world. One teacher even said that his role in regards to the learners is to “Boost their self-esteem and encourage them that they should grow as independent somebodies.”<sup>42</sup> He does this by encouraging the students to respect themselves and respect others as well. This sense of responsibility on the part of the teachers is really great, and will be beneficial in the long run to girls’ self-esteem if the energy of the teachers is focused in the right direction.

One thing that I did struggle with in regards to the teachers as role models is the way in which they sometimes acted in a sexist manner. I know that this is a product of the culture here, but I think that through changing little things like this women will eventually be equal with men, but not until that time. For example, if a girl did not have a chair to sit in, a boy was made to give up his chair. Or, if the desks needed to be moved, it was the boys who were asked to move them rather than the girls. Also, the girls are the ones who are expected to clean the classrooms while the boys are responsible for moving the desks, etc. I think that these tasks, although seemingly meaningless, actually send important messages to girls about their place in this society. If teachers want to be good role models and examples for the girls of

---

<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Dube, personal communication, 24 November 2004, Motherwell.

<sup>41</sup> Mr. Too Short, personal communication, 25 November 2004, Motherwell.

<sup>42</sup> Mr. Ponase, personal communication, 10 November 2004, Motherwell.

tomorrow in the future, then they should act accordingly and not buy into such cultural stereotypes.

*Areas in which self-esteem can be affected positively:*

The best part about this study for me was being able to see the great opportunities there are for girls to be impacted positively in the future. The system as it stands is not near perfect, and there is much to be done in helping girls have better self-esteem. I saw this imperfection of the educational system and the implementation of programs as room for opportunity rather than failure. I think that self-esteem is really something that is just beginning to be addressed and the ways in which it can be brought into the classroom are only now slowly becoming obvious.

I remain with my conclusion that the school is the best possible way for girls' self-esteem to be enhanced. There are many factors of school that I saw during my observation that could be included in the uplifting of girls' self-esteem.

Schools have unlimited access to girls on a consistent basis. They are an ideal way for girls to receive positive life messages that can be reinforced daily through classroom activities and lessons. Because of consistent exposure girls will be more willing to believe and internalise positive messages, and teachers/other role models will have access to monitor progress and the overall attitude of girls.

Schools also have the ability to design the messages that are sent to girls through curriculum development. Messages can be created and presented in such a way that is positive and uplifting for girls. The classroom activities through which the material will be presented is a great opportunity for girls to really grasp the subject

matter. These activities can greatly impact the effect of the material and messages as well.

Teachers within schools are the ultimate resource for girls. In adolescence role models are particularly important, and girls will pay attention to their teachers. The teachers at Zanoxolo and from LoveLife understand the responsibility of being a role model for these girls, and they should take advantage of the opportunity. Through their own attitudes towards themselves as well as their attitudes towards the class, the material, and life in general, teachers will be able to send the ultimate messages to girls. As role models teachers have constant contact with students, and are respected by the students, so their presence is crucial in making girls have better self-esteem. It is also important to note that teachers need to consider their cultural and personal values and how these may impact students. If teachers think that only girls should clean, then girls will internalise this message as well. Values are an important part of being a role model, and teacher should think about how they present themselves and their values to the class before they accept this position as a role model.

It is clear that the school is a great resource in enhancing girls' self-esteem. Many aspects of school can be a part of this important process of helping girls to have better self-esteem, and they are all important parts of the whole. The school now needs to step up as the resource that it is, and take advantage of these methods of helping girls.

### **Problems with this study:**

This study, like all studies, had its problems. There are a few main problems that are significant to address as they directly affected the results. They include

language barrier, timing, and project definition. There are of course other factors that affected the study as well, but they did not appear to be as significant as the factors listed above.

Language barrier, although not detrimental to my observation, definitely made it difficult for me at times. Originally I was planning on working with a high school class so the classes would be in English, but the primary school seemed to be the best fit for my needs. This meant that we were stuck with Xhosa. The classes were taught in Xhosa because the students would get the most out of the class that way, which is really what is most important. I also wanted to see the students in their natural environment, and in grade seven that means learning in Xhosa. Allowing the students to learn in Xhosa which is their natural environment made assessing the classroom situation more realistic.

I was quite frustrated at times because I thought that really understanding the wording of a lesson or the response of a student could have added to my research. My assessment of both self-esteem of the students as well as ways in which the teacher addressed this issue both directly and indirectly could have been enhanced with complete understanding on my part. Instead I was left with being able to get the general idea of what was happening, and I did a lot of reading body language as well. My adaptive methods were effective, but did not give me the entire effect for which I had hoped.

The language barrier also posed a problem when doing my classroom activities. The goal definition exercise, although I explained it before hand and did get some great answers, appeared confusing for some of the students. When I tried to hold a discussion about goals and dreams the students were silent. There was one little boy who was willing to answer all of my questions, but it was not the discussion that I had

wanted because I was not able to get as much information from them as I would have liked. I think that having them speak in English that day affected their participation as many of them, although they understood my English, seemed intimidated to partake in the conversation.

The body mapping exercise was more successful than the goal definition exercise. But still, the lack of the students' vocabulary in English and my inability to really speak and understand Xhosa despite my efforts, affected the body and picture descriptions as well as the quality of the activity. I wish that I had been able to communicate my desires with them in Xhosa because I think I would have gotten more detailed pictures that could have given me a better idea of how the students really see themselves. I did have one of the LoveLife workers help me and translate for me, but I think there was much something was lost in translation.

Timing also proved to be a problem in this project. The timing of the school year, the length of the ISP research period, and the timing of my access to the LoveLife workers all affected the outcomes of this project.

When working with schools it is hard to get the access and attention that is necessary for a project of this manner when it is the end of the school year. Schools are closing for the most part at the end of this week, so most students have been writing exams for the last month. This writing period means that regular classes are not generally taking place, and students spend most of their time playing on the school grounds rather than in class. Mrs. Dube and the faculty at Zanoxolo Primary school were very accommodating to my needs, but I think that a project of this nature should be done during the regular school year when students are not focused on exams and teachers are adhering to the normal schedule.

It was hard for me to evaluate from a nonbiased nature because I knew that the accommodations were made especially for my visit. This led me to wonder what would have taken place if I was not there, and what kind of Life Skills instruction the students would have gotten without LoveLife and my presence in the classroom.

I also found that the length of the ISP research time was not as much as I would have liked. Although I was able to accomplish what I set out to do specifically in my project, I wish that I had had more time in the school with the students. I think that a longer research period would definitely be necessary if I were to continue this research. I realize that the ISP is just a beginning research project, and that time is an important factor when creating one's project, but I think that a month is really not long enough to do good field research. When reading reports of other field research, a month was often the time that researchers spent just getting used to his or her environment, or the time that he or she let her participants get used to him or her. With such a short period of time it really limited what I was able to accomplish in the field.

The third problem with time was that my advisors were often busy. This would not be a problem if the ISP research time were much longer, but having the combination of only approximately three weeks to do research and have my advisors be busy at the same time is difficult. Although they were all very accommodating to me and my research needs, I was not able to develop the type of relationship that I would have liked to develop with an advisor in only one month's time. This is not at all to blame my advisors or myself. I think it was unfortunate that I did not get to spend more time developing this relationship, and I think that if the project were to happen over an extended period of time I would make much more of an effort to connect with my advisor. It was also hard that the woman I was working with in the

classroom had to go away for the final week when I was doing my classroom activities. I understand that these were not her responsibility, but I do wonder if her consistent presence in the classroom would have changed the participation results in my activities.

The third main problem with my project was that of project definition. This problem stems also from timing because I was unable to really develop the project to its full potential. But, the main problem lies in the fact that due to factors in the field such as timing and language barriers, my original project ideas were only touched upon. I had set out to assess the self-esteem as enhanced through the Life Skills class, which I did to some extent, but because I couldn't fully assess the girls due to language issues, I was unable to do exactly what I set out to do.

What I did learn from this experience and facing these major problems in my research is that all research is valuable. Although I did not do exactly what I set out to do, I was able to spend quality time in the classroom and I was able to complete the classroom activities that I wanted to complete. The activities even did not have the exact results for which I had hoped, but they have led me to a better understanding of what research could be done in the future as well as some of the issues facing the implementation of the Life Skills curriculum today and the ways in which it could help girls' self-esteem.

## **Conclusions**

After much observation of and interaction with the adolescent girls of Zanoxolo Primary School made up of teenagers from Motherwell, the importance of good self-esteem has been made even clearer to me. Motherwell is a tough area to live

with a great deal of poverty, unemployment, and lots of crime. Even at a young age children are exposed to these factors of life as a part of their reality. There are many pressures on children in the community and much of that pressure comes from peers. Peer pressure, when unrivalled with confident, self-assured children, is easy to give into. The pressures that face these children are far greater than any pressures I have ever known, and they face them relentlessly.

In order for children to stand up to the pressures that they face they need good self-esteem. This is true for both girls and boys, but the pressures that face girls are greater than those that face boys because they also face more cultural pressures that teach them to be inferior to boys. Girls need good self-esteem in all cases, but here in Motherwell it is particularly evident that girls are in great need of good self-esteem.

### **My Recommendations:**

Self-esteem needs to become the focus of health education. Though HIV/AIDS, sexuality, and alcohol and drug education are also very important, self-esteem is the key to solving all of these problems. Life Skills education should be based on the fundamental element of good self-esteem. This will fit in well into the Life Orientation curriculum because it directly addresses the originality and importance of each child.

With good self-esteem girls will be able to stand up to peer pressure. They will be able to make healthy and informed decisions that will enable them to lead healthier and more successful lives. These girls will be less likely to have sex at an early age, and will then be less likely to become pregnant at a young age. They will also be less



likely to be exposed to HIV/AIDS, and will be more likely to say no when faced with alcohol and drugs.

Girls with self-esteem are also more likely to have dreams and goals and to act accordingly to achieve these goals and dreams. Goals and dreams will enable girls to break out of the township cycle that makes girls stay where they were raised and raise families of their own without having the opportunity to do anything else.

Self-esteem education also needs to become a cultural focus. While making it the focus of the health education program in schools is important, the effect of this program will not be significant if there is not also a shift in cultural values. Women and girls need to become more important in this society. Given equal status, women and girls will work together with men to make this society one in which both groups can function in any setting or situation. This new sense of values is the key to making women empowered. Empowerment of women will help to balance out the larger values in this society, and will help eventually to lower crime rates and poverty, and to raise employment.

This cultural shift also needs to include a change of attitude among parents. It appeared through my class observation that many of the children do not have very open relationships with their parents. Learners at Zanoxolo said their parents were “shy.” They also said that parents would question “where did you get that information” when students tried to talk with them about sex.<sup>43</sup> Parents in this culture are still adjusting to the new mentality with sex and HIV/AIDS being discussed openly in school. This adjustment needs to happen more quickly and needs to be comprehensive as well.

---

<sup>43</sup> Student Group Interview, personal communication, 18 November 2004, Motherwell.

Parents could be an important resource for adolescent girls in getting better self-esteem. Parents, however, need to recognize the importance of this subject to their children, and also will need to break down some cultural lines in order to do so. Parental education about self-esteem as well as school efforts in general could greatly benefit parents as well as their children. Schools could also benefit from the added support that could come from parents if they better understood the need for their support.

There could be programs developed that teach about Life Skills, especially self-esteem and female empowerment, which work with parents, teachers, and students at the same time. Through the teamwork of these resources girls would have optimal exposure to role models and all of the parties would benefit from the education as well. This could also help students to develop more open relationships with their parents, and parents could develop better relationships with teachers and become a better source of support for the school. With this improved level of support and openness with children, parents will help to improve the overall education that their children receive because learning will not take place only in the classroom, but will continue at home.

Beyond the Life Skills class during Life Orientation, the school also needs to become a greater resource for self-esteem for girls. The general curriculum, the treatment of girls in the classroom, and teachers as role models will all be a part of this necessary change.

The general curriculum needs to be more self-esteem enhancing for girls. Although the Life Skills curriculum should focus on self-esteem, this topic should not be limited to Life Orientation class. Self-esteem can be integrated into the curriculum of all of the other classes as well. These classes will not directly talk about self-esteem

necessarily, but self-esteem enhancing messages for girls should be a part of these other classes. In a history class, for example, strong women who have succeeded in life and accomplished great things should be exposed to the learners so that they know what women are able to achieve. It is also important that the women who are used as examples are culturally relevant, and that they send positive messages for girls that promote strong, confident, able women.

This new curriculum should be applicable to all subject areas. Some of the messages may not be as obvious as the history lesson, but they should still be present. There is room in each subject's curriculum to impact the lives of girls positively, even if only to help their positive life attitudes. Girls notice what is being taught in the classroom, this is actually their base for knowledge, and the subject material that they learn should help their life attitudes as well as expand their base of knowledge.

Treatment of girls in the classroom is another way to help girls' self-esteem. It was clear that the number of boys that participated was more than that of girls. Rather than let this be the condition of class participation, teachers should encourage girls to become more involved in the class. Girls and boys should also be held to the same expectations. This applies to answering questions, cleaning, and behaviour.

If teachers treat boys and girls in the same way then girls and boys will be more likely to see each other as equals as well. There should not be special cases made for girls or boys. This means that if a girl is the last to enter a class and she does not have a place to sit she should only be given a chair if the same would be done if a boy were the last to enter a class. Messages of equality are uplifting to girls because they open opportunities for girls that they would see as otherwise cut off by inequality.

Teachers also need to use their responsibility as role models to a greater extent. Although they did appear to take this role very seriously, there is room for

improvement in the implementation of this role. Teachers need to think about their own cultural attitudes towards gender, they need to think about the way they live their lives, and they need to think how their interactions with the students as well as other faculty and parents affect how students see them.

Cultural attitudes towards gender can not be changed overnight. However, teachers who are serious about helping girls' self-esteem will make a great effort to address boys and girls equally in and out of the classroom. They will also think about their teaching style and how this may affect girls and boys differently. Teachers need to be aware that their own views of gender will be played out through their teaching whether they do it consciously or subconsciously. This is why it is very important that teachers fully understand their own views about gender in their culture. If there is going to be a shift in gender views, the classroom is a great place to start, and teachers should be willing to help with this attitude adjustment.

This attitude adjustment is relevant for teachers beyond the classroom as well. How teachers live their lives outside of the classroom is also very important because this affects their own mentality and is then projected onto the students as well. Teachers that want to promote equal gender roles need to live lives that promote equality among genders as well. Gender issues are relevant in the home, on the street, and among all people. Gender equality is applicable when considering who cooks and cleans the house as well as how women and men treat each other in the home. A male teacher that wants to promote gender equality in the class room must also be willing to practice gender equality at home which may mean that he needs to cook for his family or do household cleaning.

Both female and male teachers will need to think about their behaviour in their lives outside of the classroom. This adjustment may take time, but will be effective in

helping girls to see themselves as equal to boys. Through this new found equality girls will be more likely to have higher self-esteem.

In the classroom and school setting teacher relations with each other, with parents, and with students are also important. These interactions set the standard for how students will interact with each other and with adults. If these interactions are positive and non gender biased, students will see that as the example to follow. Through these dealings students also have the opportunity to learn about strong, powerful women in examples of female teachers who are assertive and capable themselves.

### **Recommendations for future research:**

Through my three weeks of field research I was able to see many areas for future research. More time, more resources, and more project development would all be necessary for this further research, but there is definitely room and a great deal of need for this kind of future study.

#### **Study 1: Rural Area overview:**

There needs to be an assessment of the rural area similar to the assessment that I have done in an urban township. This assessment would include observation time in schools, interviews with teachers and area educators, an assessment of educational programs available in the area, as well as activities done in the classroom with students in order to get a better sense of the level of self-esteem amongst the students. Though this would not be a quantitative study, the value of the qualitative data would

be great because from that research further studies as well as projects could be developed to help girls in the area.

This study should start in a pilot area, but then could be spread to more rural areas if successful. It would be important to see what impact could be made in one specific area rather than spread one's resources too thin in the beginning stages of this research. A case study format would be the best way in which to conduct this project.

It would also be important for the implementation of this project to be over a longer span of time than one month. The opportunity to observe in a classroom would be more effective if one is able to observe for a long span of time because students and teachers will feel comfortable with an outsiders' presence in the classroom. This will also allow for an observer to have optimal time to see what actually takes place in the classroom. The relationships that an observer may develop will also be of more substance if given more time to grow.

#### Study 2: Comprehensive Self-Esteem Assessment in an urban township:

This study would use classroom observation, activities, and individual interviews with students to assess the level of self-esteem. This would require work within the same language, so either a researcher who speaks Xhosa could work with the younger population, or a native English speaker like me could work with older students. In this way so language would not a hindering factor within the research. It would be best to have a native Xhosa speaker work with the students because within their native language students will be able to better express themselves which would be important in such a study.

Each student participating in the study would do a series of interviews in which they discuss many topics of life. The interviewer would conduct the interviews after a month of class observation in which he or she would participate with the students in order to get a sense of their personalities. The activities conducted could include body-mapping and goal definition, but would not be limited to just those ideas. One should also do more with family and friend mapping, idea development, and learning assessment.

This study should be done in a given area for an extended period of time in order for the researcher to have a complete review of the students' studied as well as the environment in which they live and learn. However, this case study format could also be used in a rural area or an urban school as well. It would actually be interesting to do the assessment in each of the three areas, and then compare and contrast the results. This could enable one to see the areas that are most in need of help and resources, as well as assess the most significant problems facing each area.

### Study 3: Pilot Self-Esteem Education Programs:

This study would follow the two previous studies, and could be conducted in a rural, urban, or township community. The actual development of the programs that would be implemented would come from the assessments that had hitherto taken place, and would be based on the evaluations and information gained from these studies. The area in which this study would take place could be established on a need-based assessment, but if successful could be implemented in all three of the areas.

The program would be an educational program conducted in the classroom. The idea of the program would be activity-based education. The foundation of the

program would be self-esteem enhancement, but the program would cover all topics that are covered in the public school curriculum.

The teacher to implement the program will have had to be trained in activity-based education and would need experience having taught in the style that encourages creative thinking and self-motivation. The teacher and an observer would be the two main researchers for this study. It would be important to have an observer as well as the teacher so that a non-biased assessment could take place by the observer.

Students within the program would be part of a randomly selected class that would be no different from any other class at the school. These students would follow the same class schedule as the other students at the school, and would not be given any special treatment so as to cut out as many confounding variables as possible.

The program itself will be a pilot curriculum and teaching style that would focus on teaching the course material to the students through activities and class participation. This program will be much like the Outcome Based Education program that is already here in South Africa, but would actually implement the activities and teaching style that is highlighted in the OBE program.

The assessment will be on the effectiveness of this style of learning for the students. It will also measure the level of students' self-esteem at the conclusion of the program as compared to the level at the beginning of the program. The self-esteem levels will be measured through interviews and class observation, similar to the format of assessment in Study 2. The teaching style will also be monitored and reviewed for effectiveness by the learning of the students and the comprehension of the course material.



## Closing Thoughts

There are many programs like this one that could be effective in looking at the affect of teaching on girls' self-esteem. The above studies are the studies that should take place next following my research here in South Africa. If I had the resources and time to do more studies, I would develop proposals from the above ideas. I hope that someday I will be able to come back to this subject area and location, and in fact do some of this research. I have seen first hand the necessity of such research, and I know that educational programs can be very effective for adolescent girls.

Empowered girls with high self-esteem will be able to stand up to peer pressure. They will also eventually save their communities from HIV/AIDS through their ability to make educated and informed decisions. The long term affects of self-esteem for girls are tremendous. If South Africa is serious about fighting HIV/AIDS, they should look to the education of their youth, and girls in particular.

Schools are the best point of access for girls. The South African Department of Education along with many partners need to take advantage of their consistent and influential access to girls. In a country where more people are infected with HIV every day, many of them being adolescent girls, it is time to step up and make some changes. Education through schools will make the difference that adolescent girls need. With better self-esteem more girls will lead healthier lives and can change the course of not only HIV/AIDS, but will also give more hope for the future of women in this country as a whole.

## Bibliography

A M Education Consultants, *Life Skills Manual for Primary School*, Department of Health in South Africa, 1999.

Alcala, Maria Jose, *Action for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Reproductive Health & Rights for All*, Smart Design Inc.: New York, 1994.

American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Marlowe & Company: New York, 1992.

Clark, Aminah, *How to Raise Teenagers' Self-Esteem*, Price Stern Sloan: Los Angeles, 1990.

Critical Thinking website, <http://www.austhink.org>, accessed on 30 November 2004.

Gullotta, Thomas P., *The Adolescent Experience*, Academic Press: San Diego, 1999

Kalichman, Seth C., *Preventing AIDS*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Mahwah, New Jersey, 1998,

Knox, Michelle, "Adolescents' possible selves and their relationship to global self-esteem," *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, July 1998, v39, pg. 61.

LoveLife, *LoveLife Body Y's Teaching Manual*, South Africa: Planned Parenthood Association, 2004.

Mr. Ponase, personal communication, 10 November 2004, Motherwell.

Mr. Too Short, personal communication, 25 November 2004, Motherwell.

Mrs. Dube, personal communication, 24 November 2004, Motherwell.

Mrs. Lukwe, personal communication, 16 November 2004, Motherwell.

Mrs. Mayana, personal communication, 30 November 2004, North End, Port Elizabeth.

Student Group Interview, personal communication, 18 November 2004, Motherwell.

## Helpful Contacts

Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa  
Eastern Cape  
Mrs. Mayana, Provincial Director  
Tel: (041) 487-2672  
Email: [ppaec@wn.apc.org](mailto:ppaec@wn.apc.org)

LoveLife of Motherwell  
Motherwell, Port Elizabeth, South Africa  
Y- Center Tel: (041) 462-3235  
Other Communication should be through PPASA office of Eastern Cape

Zanoxolo Primary School  
Motherwell, Port Elizabeth, South Africa  
Mrs. Ntombi Dube, Director of Health Education  
Tel: (072) 460-6622

## Appendix A

Kelsey Sullivan

9-11-2004

SIT Public Health

Interview Questions for school Educators

13. Name, School name, Position  
Where do you live? First Language?  
How long have you worked here?  
Class level and subject?
2. What is your favourite part of teaching?
3. What is your least favourite part?
4. Can you talk a little bit about the Life Orientation curriculum?  
What topics do you cover? (Favorites, least favorites)  
How is this class received by the students? Parents?  
How long has this program been around South Africa?  
How long has the program been in this school?  
What is your major role as a Life Orientation teacher? (if that is the case)
5. What is the dynamic between girls and boys here?
6. What are the major issues facing girls in this area today?
7. What is the general attitude of the female population in your class?
8. How would you describe the level of self-esteem in girls in your class?
9. Is this topic something that is discussed in school?
10. Is there anything being done to raise girls' self-esteem? (If yes, what?)
11. Do you think this is an important topic? Why or why not?
12. What is your relationship with students here?
13. What role can you play in the students' lives? (Do you see yourself as a role model for the students?)

## Appendix B

Kelsey Sullivan  
SIT-Public Health  
Questions for Students

1. Name, age, grade, home, first language?
2. How long have you been a student at Zanoxolo?
3. Do you like it here?
4. Tell me about Life Orientation Class?
  - A. What do you learn about?
  - B. Do you think this is an important class?
  - C. Do you enjoy this class?
5. How do you like your LO (Life Orientation) teachers?
6. How do you feel in the classroom?
7. Do you think that boys and girls are given equal opportunities here?
8. What do you think about self-esteem?
9. Is this important? Why?
10. What do you think of your self-esteem? Of your classmates' self-esteem?
11. Do you talk about self-esteem in LO?
12. What are the biggest problems facing girls in this community?
13. What are the biggest problems facing boys in this community?
14. What do you think about school?
15. What are your relationships with your teachers like? Can you talk to them?
16. What are your relationships with your parents/guardians like? Can you talk to them?

## Appendix C

Kelsey Sullivan  
11-11-2004  
SIT-Public Health  
Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Dear School Committee Members,

Greetings, how are you? I am a student from the United States who is studying at UPE for the semester. I am with the SIT-Public Health program headed by Dr. Guma. I am doing a project that focuses on the self-esteem of adolescent girls, specifically in the public schools setting in the Life Skills course. I am hoping to be able to have access to Zanoxolo Primary school from November 8, 2004, until November 26, 2004. If possible, I will be going to the Life Orientation classes along with a LoveLife Groundbreaker and Facilitator. I will be present for the classes during the first two weeks, and then I hope to conduct two of the classes in the final week. I hope to do the following exercises with the students:

### Activity 1: Self-Perception Body-Mapping

The body-mapping that I plan to do is different from that which is normally used in participatory research. I plan to have the students draw life-size diagrams of themselves, and create a self-portrait using any means necessary to tell the group who they are. I hope that through this activity I will be able to assess the level of self-esteem within a representative group of the area, as well as learn more about the students and their sense of self-concept. I realize that this is not a quantitative method of research, but my topic will be evaluated on more of a qualitative basis. I hope that through the word choice on the diagrams, as well as the pictures themselves, I will be able to have a good understanding of how these students see themselves.

### Activity 2: Goal Definition

The second activity that I plan to do is that of goal definition. I want to learn about the students' goals and dreams in life. This, again, is a qualitative review of the students' own ideas of what they are capable, and will allow me to again learn more about the students as well as their life plans. I plan to have each student write down five goals, five dreams, where they want to be in five years, where they think they will be in five years, and where they want to be in ten years, and where they think they will be in ten years. By 'where they will be' I mean the phase of their life, where they will be living, with whom they will be living, and what their plans are. This exercise, though clearly beneficial to me, will also be beneficial for the students because it will make them both think about their futures, as well as put the idea in their head that they should think about their futures and that they have something to look forward to beyond tomorrow.

I am working with both Mrs. Mayana as well as Mrs. Dube to coordinate this project. I thank you in advance for your cooperation and I very much appreciate the opportunity to be present in such a wonderful school. Have a great finish to the school year!

Thank you,  
Kelsey Sullivan, SIT Student  
12 Mati Square, Kwaford  
New Brighton, Port Elizabeth  
South Africa, 6000  
(041) 454-6032

## Appendix D

Kelsey Sullivan  
11-11-2004  
SIT-Public Health  
Body Mapping Instructions

The body mapping exercise will be conducted with the class of about 30 to 40 students in Zanoxolo Primary school during my last week of research at the school. All students in the class will be expected to participate as it is part of the Life Skills program.

1. Welcome Students (2 min.)
2. Describe Exercise in brief: (3 min.)

I want to see how the students see themselves: their strengths, their weaknesses, their functioning body parts, their emotions, how they fit in their environments (if necessary I can draw an example on the board)

3. Distribute materials: (10 min.) each student will get a big piece of paper as well as a marker

4. Set the time frame: (25 min.) Tell students they have 25 minutes to work on the exercise as long as they stay focused and on task.

-During this time I will walk around the room and monitor the work and behaviour of students. I will also bring my disposable camera to photograph the process, and some of the final products (at a later stage) as well.

5. See if there is a student who is willing to present. If so, then that student can show his/her body map to the class, if not, then we can move on to the discussion.

6. Discussion: (15 min)

Questions:

- How was the exercise?
- What did you enjoy about it?
- What did you not enjoy?
- How did it make you feel?

7. Thank you and wrap up (5 min.)

## Appendix E

Kelsey Sullivan  
SIT-Public Health  
Goals worksheet

Name:

Date:

Age:

List 5 goals/dreams you had when you were little:

List 5 goals/dreams you have right now:

Do you think about the future? What do you think?

What do you want to be doing in next year? (where do you want to live? Work?)

In five years?

In ten years?

What is your favourite day of the week?

Why do you get out of bed in the morning?