

THE IMPACT A SINGLE-GENDER EARLY ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM HAS ON THE
PERCEPTIONS OF GIRLS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS TOWARDS
EDUCATION AND THEMSELVES

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the experiences and impact of single-gender education in early elementary classrooms (grades kindergarten through second) from the perspectives of the fourth and fifth-grade girls that experienced these classrooms in a low-socioeconomic community in South Carolina at Hopkins Elementary School. The theory guiding the study was Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory explaining how a person's environments impact their thoughts and behaviors. Often students who enter school from families of poverty continue to live in poverty after they graduate if they indeed make it to graduation (Hughes, 2009). To break this cycle, it is critical for students from poverty situations develop positive perceptions of education and themselves. The study utilized interviews, focus groups, a survey, written prompts, and other archived data were analyzed and coded for themes. Findings from this study revealed the girls were impacted by their experiences in the single-gender early elementary classrooms regarding perceptions of education and themselves. The girls noted an increase in personal identity in the areas of confidence and self-esteem along with an increase in academic perseverance in the areas of work ethic and willingness to try. These two areas provided the opportunity for the girls to set goals for college, careers, and their future.

Keywords: early elementary, girls' perceptions, low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, single-gender classrooms, single-gender education, single-sex education

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior and my family who have supported me, encouraged me, and stood by my side throughout this process.

First, I want to thank my Lord and Savior who without Him this dissertation would not have been possible. You have continually shown Your love and blessings to me throughout this process. Thank you for helping me as I work daily towards becoming the Romans 12 girl that I desire to be.

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List of Abbreviations

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Single-gender education has risen in the public school setting in the United States at various levels from kindergarten to college. The Title IX law, as specifically noted in sections 5131(a) (23) and 5131(c) of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (passed in 2006 and the rulings of 2012 upholding the 2006 passage), allow actions and promote legalization of single-gender classrooms and/or schools in the public school systems across the United States (NASSPE, 2016). Before the passage of this law, single-gender classrooms of all girls or all boys were not legal in the public school setting. Since the adoption of the law, single-gender education has been a topic that is highly debated. The questions debated include those focused on whether single-gender classrooms impact students academically, socially, and especially their future career choices.

As single-gender classrooms have grown, some states, such as South Carolina, created a position in the Department of Education to serve as director of single-gender education for their state. South Carolina director, David Chadwell, worked with schools implementing single-gender classrooms, providing professional development, and collecting data from school staff, students, and parents across the state. In addition to states and schools collecting data on the newly implemented single-gender classrooms, researchers began to create and implement studies aimed at answering the many questions that surfaced after the legalization and implementation of these classes. Researchers, Joo (2010) and Smith, Pasero, and McKenna (2014), suggest single-gender education resulted in positive effects for students both in their academic and personal lives.

An aspect of my review of the related literature resulted in the examination of current studies that primarily focused on middle and high school single-gender classrooms and their effects on high school girls and their mathematics attainment, for future careers, or on the academic attainment and graduation rates of African American males (Eisele, Zand, & Thomson, 2009; Goodkind, 2013; Tambo, Munakandafa, Matswetu, & Munodawafa, 2011). However, such research resulted in questions among educators, parents, students, and communities. Some of these questions surrounded the impact of single-gender classrooms at earlier grade levels, on males versus females (over time) and higher-socioeconomic neighborhoods versus low-socioeconomic neighborhoods.

Throughout this case study, I addressed the gaps in the literature by focusing on single-gender classrooms of girls at the early elementary level in a low-socioeconomic neighborhood from 2011 to 2014. The purpose of this qualitative case study was for fourth and fifth-grade girls in single-gender classrooms to describe their early educational (kindergarten through second grade) experiences, related to their perceptions of education and themselves. These girls were from low-socioeconomic backgrounds in a particular school district in South Carolina. In this chapter, I will explain how I chose a case study, as it gives the participants the opportunity to share their testimonies of the single-gender classroom experience at the early elementary level. Utilizing the case study method also allowed me the opportunity to use the “narratives to optimize the opportunity of the reader to gain an experiential understanding of the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 40). The single-gender, early elementary classrooms were generally defined as classroom settings (kindergarten through second grade) where girls could develop positive characteristics, such as self-esteem and confidence towards education and themselves, which

could, in turn, impact the poverty cycle that exists for them now and into their future (Erarslan and Rankin, 2013).

Background

Historically, students who enter school from families of poverty continue to live in poverty after they graduate from high school if they indeed make it to graduation (Hughes, 2009). To break this cycle, it is critical that students from poverty situations develop positive perceptions of education and themselves (Hughes, 2009). A study completed by Kohlhass, Lin and Chu (2010) showed that “independently and interactively the three variables –gender, ethnicity, and poverty– had statistically significant effects on students’ science performance” (p. 6). Joo (2010) stated that “it is very important to study poor girls’ outcomes because many of them are likely to head families with children when public transfer programs and marriage do not offer much economic security” (pp. 807-808). These positive perceptions are essential, especially for girls, to stop the cycle of poverty in their families. The poverty cycle often impacts not only the families and students who live in the continual cycle, but also the community, the businesses in the community, and the school (Erarslan & Rankin, 2013).

Poverty cycles impact girls beginning at a young age. Lee and Otaiba (2015) discussed how gender and poverty begin to intertwine and impact one another at the early elementary level before these students even reach second grade. The data on low-socioeconomic neighborhoods show how many of the households are managed by females rather than males (Joo, 2010). Joo (2010), amongst other researchers, noted that even when males are present in the home, it is often the women who are still in control of the household and thus the ones passing down the values and attitudes of the family and neighborhood. Erarslan and Rankin (2013), stated how in low-socioeconomic communities and families that the values and attitudes being passed down

are often internalized and acted upon by the girls in the families and communities. Booth and Nolen (2012) researched how nurture played a role in behaviors and attitudes by gender both at present and in the future:

Broadly speaking those differences [in risk behavior] may be due to either nurture, nature, or some combination of the two. For example, boys are pushed to take risks when participating in competitive sports, whereas girls are often encouraged to remain cautious. (p. F56)

Therefore, educators focusing on how single-gender early elementary classrooms impact the perceptions of girls in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods is needed. The goal of this research was to determine how the experiences of single-gender early elementary classrooms have impacted the perceptions of the girls towards education and themselves. These classrooms probably impact these students' personal self-efficacy and thus impact not only their individual futures, but the futures of their families, and possibly the neighborhoods in which they live.

Focusing on the impact of single-gender classrooms and how the experiences of girls in them affect their choices is important. As the girls described their experiences, they shared how their experiences had impacted their perceptions of ability, their belief systems, their future outcomes in life, their well-being, and their future accomplishments (Pajares, 2002). According to Pajares (1996), "These beliefs [self-efficacy] of personal competence affect behavior in several ways. They influence the choices individuals make and the courses of action they pursue" (p. 544).

The single-gender environment provides experiences for girls which impact their lives. Bandura's social cognitive theory explains that "behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that impact each other"

(Bandura, 1988, p.276). Spearman and Watt (2013) reported that the environment of girls, either positive or negative, had the biggest impact on their futures. Bandura (1994) continued to express how interacting with those most similar to oneself could help to make greater strides when models exist of both positive and negative outcomes. This interaction with peers ties into Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development contributing to how students learn from one another as they work and play together to see models and cues from those around them. As Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development was demonstrated by Aikman and Rao (2012), educators sought to find ways to build self-efficacy amongst their students and to help them meet their academic goals; they had also to begin thinking about the environments in which they taught their students. Along with environment and building of self-efficacy was how to surround the students with positive interactions where they could learn from one another and feel comfortable enough to be willing to try and make mistakes, to collaborate, to model, and to build a community. The educators wanted to see their students not only grow as individuals that would be academically ready for the future but also individuals with a strong self-efficacy to change their lives and hopefully the lives of their families and communities. One such environment used by educators to help develop these positive perceptions of education and self has been the use of single-gender classrooms in which girls can learn how to separate themselves and/or change the way they have been socially cued to think and believe in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods (Aikman & Rao, 2012).

The number of single-gender classrooms and schools in the United States has begun to grow with the legalization of such environments due to the passing of the 2006 Title IX law (NASSPE, 2016). Until 2006, public school systems were not allowed to separate classrooms by

gender. However, with the new law in 2006, single-gender classrooms, classrooms of all boys or all girls, were allowed as an option in schools as long as all regulations were met:

On October 25, 2006, the United States Department of Education published new regulations governing single-sex education in public schools. These new regulations were required by a provision in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a provision intended by its authors to legalize single-sex education in public schools [specifically, sections 5131(a) (23) and 5131(c) of the NCLB]. (NASSPE, 2016)

As these single-gender classrooms and schools have grown, so has the research to show the implications of such classrooms. Although the studies mentioned above point to the importance of building positive perceptions and self-efficacy at a young age, the majority of research on single-gender classrooms focused on participants in middle and high school (Eisele et al., 2009; Elmore & Oyserman, 2012; Erarslan & Rankin, 2013; Patterson & Pahlke, 2011; Schneewei & Zweimuller, 2012). Thus, it is imperative to not only look at the research of middle and high school students but to begin to study the impacts of single-gender education from early elementary levels to bridge the gap in the empirical literature.

Researchers, such as Erarslan and Rankin (2013) and Elmore and Oyserman (2012), showed that at middle and high school levels, academics were increasing in their single-gender environments. Studies conducted by Malki and Mirza (2014) and Mitchell and Stewart (2013) revealed more African-American males were graduating from high school and the numbers of males entering the special education arena were lowering due to their single-gender education experiences. Brown and Ronau (2012) noted, however, that the academic successes researched in single-gender programs were limited to girls' learning mathematics and science. Hence, studies showed that single-gender education was working academically with both males and

females. However, the studies were only focused on two academic subjects for females which created the question: do single-gender classrooms only prepare girls for careers in mathematics and science or for all academic areas and thus for future careers?

Thus, through this case study, I described how single-gender, early elementary classrooms impact the girls in them and their perceptions about education and themselves. The descriptions and further understanding of the impact of single-gender classrooms from an early age will add to the discussion about the impact that can affect their future, the future of their families and their communities. In addition, this case study added to the current research by supplying a study that reaches girls in all academic areas, students from a low-socioeconomic neighborhood, and students at the early elementary level, all of which filled a gap presently in the single-gender literature.

Situation to Self

As a kindergarten single-gender teacher for girls in a Title I school for 8 years, I have seen the cycle of poverty in my community continue with little understanding of what the school, teachers, and community could do to help change this cycle for our students. I am a Christian, mother, and teacher. As I see students beg to stay at school over the weekends and holidays, hear students call me “mom,” and hear students cry about not having eaten all weekend, I wanted to understand and find ways to help these students.

The motivation for conducting this study was to understand the impact single-gender classrooms have on the students in them, the school, and the community. I desired to understand the impact on individual students (their perceptions of education and themselves) and the impact on the poverty cycle in their community. Over the 8 years I implemented single-gender classes, I observed girls in the single-gender program, and girls in the coeducational program grow

through the years and noticed the differences both academically and in their personal lives (self-beliefs, socially, and plans for the future).

I have observed parents arguing with the principal to see their daughters continue in a single-gender classroom, citing how it had positively impacted their daughter already; while other parents are arguing for their daughters to be included because they have heard from the community the impact it had on girls in the single-gender classrooms and the parents wanted the opportunity for their daughters. I heard from students, parents, and other teachers the different ways that single-gender classes were positively impacting the students in them.

I have watched as my own daughter has experienced single-gender education classrooms. She began as a first grader and continued throughout fifth grade in single-gender classrooms. I observed her academically and even saw her establish a professional goal to be a pediatrician at the first-grade level. She is currently working towards fulfilling her goal by taking high school credits as a middle-school student. She has emerged as a leader, not just academically, but personally, rather than the follower, she was in kindergarten. As she encountered males in coeducational classes at the middle-school level, I was interested to see what would happen. She stood strong; she led, and she was confident with who she was both academically and personally. Thus, observing how my own daughter was impacted by single-gender education and observing how girls and parents in our school and community feel about the program, I wanted to understand the impact of the single-gender program. I especially wanted to focus on the girls that started in the early elementary years, to understand specifically how single-gender classrooms had impacted their perceptions towards education and themselves.

Four philosophical assumptions guided this qualitative study: ontologically, epistemologically, axiologically, and methodologically. The first assumption was ontological.

Creswell (2013) described an ontological assumption as having multiple views, and these views develop and emerge as themes throughout the study. Each participant shared her unique perspective. Analyzing the individual perspectives allowed embedded themes from all perspectives to emerge.

The second assumption was epistemological. This assumption linked to this research because there was a “relationship between the research and that being researched” (Creswell, 2013, p.21). As an educator in a low-socioeconomic neighborhood, in a single-gender kindergarten classroom of girls, I became close to the study.

The third assumption was an axiological one. In a qualitative study, I had to realize that I do have biases and that these biases do play a role in my research as the researcher (Creswell, 2013). It was my job to relate these biases and my values in the study and how these biases affected the outcomes.

The final assumption was the methodological assumption. As a qualitative researcher, it was important to ensure that the study was following a research plan and method (Creswell, 2013). It was imperative that as the study continued that the methodology was followed and that as new information was located, the methodology and questions continued to be revised as necessary.

Problem Statement

Students living in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods often continue to live in the poverty cycle unless something or someone intervenes (Payne, 2013). To break this cycle, it is critical that students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds develop positive perceptions of both education and self (Pajares, 2002). Students in single-gender classrooms at the middle and high school levels in low-socioeconomic schools have shown improvement in academics and self-

perceptions (Brown & Ronau, 2012; Kohlhass, Lin, & Chu, 2010; Smith et al., 2014; Sullivan, 2009). Fry (2009) focused on students involved in single-gender programs and noted they have higher academic success than those in coeducational settings. He noted that a single-gender environment used in classrooms for girls could play a larger role in academic success than other instructional strategies (Hart, 2015).

Eisele, et al. (2009) and Goodkind (2013) focused their studies primarily on single-gender classrooms about African-American male students at the middle and high school levels. Minimal literature exists on the early elementary levels about girls, thus showing a gap in the literature related to early elementary and single-gender classrooms. In contrast, Tambo et al. (2011) focused on middle and high school girls and primarily on their attainment of mathematics and science classes as well as their future careers.

Dentith (2008) reported some of the smartest and most “hard working girls” in high school are still some of the least “self-assured” girls (p. 145). Chesney-Lind, Morash, and Stevens (2008) researched about girls needing programs that allow them to discuss and grow with their perceptions. They stated how “research that gives girls ‘voice’ to explain their needs produces crucial evidence of the resources, interventions, and programs they might find useful” (p. 167). Taking these studies into account and the findings of Aikman and Rao (2012) and Stewart, Stewart, and Simmons (2007), home life in low-socioeconomic backgrounds plays a vital role in a person’s belief system and perceptions, therefore, adding to the significance of this current study.

Pajares (2002, 2009) discussed how girls in low-socioeconomic backgrounds could be taught self-efficacy to instill the perceptions that will enable them to break the cycle of poverty and live more productively and successfully. Therefore, based on Fry (2009), Huang (2013), and

Hughes (2009), the lack of research on single-gender females, early elementary, and low-socioeconomic neighborhoods suggested that further research is needed. Due to this gap in the literature for girls, especially in the early elementary years and in the low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, there needed to be more empirical studies to fill the gap and this study aided in filling this gap.

Therefore, the problem of the study was the impact of single-gender classrooms on the perceptions of early elementary level girls towards education and themselves.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the experiences and impact of single-gender education in early elementary classrooms (grades kindergarten through second) from the perspectives of the fourth and fifth-grade girls that experienced these classrooms in a low-socioeconomic community in South Carolina at Hopkins Elementary (pseudonym). Single-gender early elementary classrooms were defined as settings where the classroom was either all girls or all boys. For this case study, participants were girls that had been in the program since kindergarten that were currently enrolled in fourth and fifth-grade single-gender classrooms.

A case study was chosen since it gave the participants the opportunity to describe in their words the phenomenon of single-gender classrooms so that further insights could be gained (Stake, 1995 & Yin, 2003). The theory guiding this study was the social cognitive theory with an emphasis on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 2002, 2009) as it allowed learners to believe that they could learn and apply what they have learned. This particular theory supports the notion:

Teachers can work to improve their students' emotional states and to correct their faulty self-beliefs and habits of thinking (personal factors), improve their academic skills and

self-regulatory practices (behavior), and alter the school and classroom structures that may work to undermine student success (environmental factors). (Pajares, 2002, n.p.)

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to gain a better understanding of how single-gender early elementary classrooms impact girls and their perceptions of education and self through the descriptions of those having been taught in single-gender classrooms. The information gathered through this research adds to the current body of literature on single-gender classrooms and thus be available for those teachers, administrators, and stakeholders currently using single-gender classrooms or schools, those that are considering implementing single-gender classrooms, and those that need or want more information on single-gender classrooms. The significance, empirically, theoretically, and the practicality of this study will highlight ways in which this particular study adds to the current gap in the body of literature on single-gender.

The practical significance of this study is to deepen the understanding of single-gender classes at the early elementary level as it impacts girls who are living in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. Thus by providing girls with an opportunity to learn (among other girls) in a classroom setting that their perceptions may be impacted and enhanced, In the low-socioeconomic neighborhood surrounding Hopkins Elementary School, the poverty cycle continues generationally as seen through school and county data. The study showed that girls and their perceptions were impacted by single-gender classrooms at an early age, it so it could change their future regarding education and careers, thus possibly changing the poverty cycle that continues to permeate through each generation. Additionally, administrators and policy-makers will deepen their understanding of the impact of single-gender, early elementary classrooms which could alter the future of the program(s) and the future of the girls in the

program(s). Thus, the implication of this study would not just affect the girls in this study, but future girls both in this school and community, and those girls across in other areas that could benefit from being part of an early elementary, single-gender classroom.

The empirical significance of this study addresses the gap that is currently in the literature based upon single-gender classrooms. The data gathered in this case study gives real-life, descriptive accounts by the girls from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, that have experienced single-gender classrooms at the early elementary levels (Stake, 1978 & Yin, 2005). Current literature highlights how single-gender classrooms have increased academic levels and perceptions towards mathematics and science in the middle and high school years for girls (Brown & Ronau, 2012). Hence, this was an opportunity to determine if single-gender classrooms could improve the perceptions of girls at the early elementary level. Additionally, the majority of the data focused on boys academically about all academic subjects, high school graduation, and special education. The limited studies on girls still speak institutionally only to the specific subjects of mathematics and science. This study gives a voice to girls academically and to all subject areas instead of the two that have been considered (mathematics and science).

The theoretical significance of this study expands Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory by explaining how students learn from those around them and allow learners to believe that they can learn and apply what they have learned.

Research Questions

The goal of this case study was to explore the descriptions and real-life experiences of girls from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, who have experienced being in a single-gender classroom in the early elementary years (kindergarten through second grade). The following research questions outlined below guided the study. The central question was: How do single-

gender early elementary classrooms impact the perceptions of girls from a low-socioeconomic neighborhood in South Carolina toward education and themselves? The sub-questions were as follows:

RQ1: What experiences did fourth and fifth-grade girls have in their single-gender early elementary classrooms?

By using the case study method to understand the experiences of the girls in the single-gender environments, the girls shared and described their experiences in their words and their perceptions (Stake, 1978). This information provided a way to understand the impact of single-gender, early elementary classrooms. Schneeweis and Zweimuller (2012) corroborated the findings of other studies that girls are impacted by their environments.

RQ2: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls' perceptions of themselves?

According to Hart (2014), middle and high school aged students were most likely to be impacted by their peers through "focused social interaction" as to perceptions of self (p. 26).

Other studies showed that girls in general, regardless of age, shape their perceptions of themselves based upon those around them such as peers, family, community, and education (Cremin & Nakabugo, 2012; Dentith, 2008; Tambo et al., 2011). Spearman and Watt (2013) noted that girls' perceptions of self are impacted in the classroom environment.

RQ3: How do early elementary single-gender classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls' perceptions of education?

Rex and Chadwell (2009), Sax (2006), and Tambo, et al. (2011), discuss how girls and boys learn differently and that classrooms should, therefore, be created to meet their diverse learning needs to give them better opportunities to grow academically.

RQ4: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls' future plans?

In a literature critique by Cremin and Nakabugo (2012), they discussed economic development and how it has changed. They believe that now “rather than expecting economic development to bring about improvements such as the alleviation of poverty . . . development should be pursued in all of these areas directly in the knowledge that progress in each area will interact favorably with the others” (p. 499). Thus, combining “the better educational standards” piece and “need for poverty reduction” Cremin and Nakabugo (2012) share a need that holds true across the United States in low socio-economic neighborhoods (p. 499).

Definitions

1. *Low-socioeconomic Neighborhood* - A neighborhood where the majority, if not all, families are below the poverty line, parents' educational levels are limited, parental occupations are limited, and household goods, residence, and automobiles are also limited, and the families are receiving government aid (Kingston, Huang, Calzada, Dawson-McCure, & Brotman, 2013; Yelgun & Karaman, 2015).
2. *Parents* – A student's biological parents or guardians which include but is not limited to those guardians, grandparents, aunts/uncles, foster parents, or other non-biological parents that are the student's legal guardian if they are not with their biological parents (IDEA, 2004).
3. *Perception of self* - How one sees themselves and how it “influence[s] their psychological functioning” and thus impacts their future (Osmanaga, 2014).

4. *Self-efficacy* - A person's ability and belief system that they can alter their outcomes in life-based upon the way they motivate themselves, take care of their well-being, and produce the accomplishments they pursue (Pajares, 2002).
5. *Single-gender classroom* – A classroom defined as “one in which the learning environment is identical to a mixed-gender classroom regarding the curriculum being taught, yet different regarding class makeup, teaching strategies, and learning styles” (English, 2014, p. 47).
6. *Social Cognitive Theory* - “Behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other” (Bandura, 1988, p. 276)
7. *Social Learning Theory* - A “theory of human behavior that posts that cognitions, behavior, and environment interact to explain the acquisition, instigation, and maintenance” of their behavior (Spiropoulos, 2010).
8. *Zone of Proximal Development* - “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Summary

Every day students in all classrooms create perceptions of education and themselves which impacts their future lives. With the legalized introduction in 2006 of single-gender education classrooms, research began to increase awareness about the impact of these classrooms on students' academics or perceptions. This increase was due in part in reaction to the overwhelming controversy over whether single-gender education was beneficial or not as well as

questioning if it was sexist or stereotyping (Hart, 2015; Gross-Loh, 2014; & Muti, 2015; Salomone, 2015). However, I discovered the majority of literature focused on the middle and high school levels, on African-American males, and on academics. Payne (2005) found that students, particularly in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, tend to continue to live in the poverty cycle unless something or someone intervenes. A study completed by Kohlhas et al. (2010) showed that “independently and interactively the three variables –gender, ethnicity, and poverty– had statistically significant effects on student’s science performance” (p. 6).

In Chapter One, I provided evidence of the need for further research about the impact of single-gender, early elementary classrooms (kindergarten through second grade) in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. These impacts include the perceptions of girls’ education and themselves. By utilizing individual interviews, focus groups, surveys, artifacts, and their writings, the girls, their parents, their teachers, and their principal will have the opportunity to describe how single-gender classrooms impacted their perceptions of education and themselves at the early elementary level. Also, the chapter highlighted the significance of the study in regards to both current and future single-gender classrooms as well as the communities where these students live. The research questions and delimitations and limitations were also discussed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

English (2014) defines the single-gender classroom as “one in which the learning environment is identical to a mixed-gender classroom regarding the curriculum being taught, yet different regarding class makeup, teaching strategies, and learning styles” (p. 47). Single-gender education (both regarding single-gender schools, such as a school of all girls or all boys and as coeducational schools that offer single-gender classrooms) has grown in the United States over the last 10 years. This growth has come in part due to the passing of the 2006 Title IX law under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as specifically noted in sections 5131(a)(23) and 5131(c) of the NCLB allowing single-gender classrooms in public schools (NASSEP website, 2016). Single-gender classrooms were included as part of this legislation for NCLB as an option to help provide safeguards to ensure that every child learns to his or her potential and is not left behind.

When administrators in public schools in the United States decide to offer single-gender education classes in a coeducational school, then three requirements must be met by the school. Those requirements include providing a rationale for offering single-gender classes, providing an alternative coeducational classroom, and conducting a review of the necessity for the classes every two years (NASSEP website, 2016). After the passage of the law in 2006, the numbers of single-gender classrooms and schools across the United States has grown. In South Carolina alone the programs grew from no programs in 2006 to 200 programs in 2009 (Chadwell, 2009).

However, the growth of single-gender education has not come without controversy. Hart (2015) noted how single-gender education had brought debate from both sides on whether it is appropriate or effective. Salomone (2004) stated that “next to the funding of school athletics, single-sex education is probably the most divisive issue in the modern-day quest for gender

equality in education” (pp. 63-64). While Hart (2015) and Salomone (2004) speak to the controversy in their articles, the realm of public opinion sheds more light on the controversy in single-gender education. Even 9 years after the legalization of single-gender education, the controversy and questions still arise in the public realm as seen in an article written by Muti (2015). Muti, the head of school at Ashley Hall in South Carolina, felt it necessary to share his personal experience and evidence to support the single-gender education program at his school following an article printed the previous week about whether single-gender education was successful or needed (2015). Gross-Loh (2014) noted and discussed how opponents to single-gender education would argue that it was both sexist and provided gender stereotyping in addition to beliefs that there is no scientific proof that it has tangible benefits. However, Gross-Loh (2014) shared testimonies of students in single-gender education that believed in it wholeheartedly, along with noting how the numbers of single-gender education classrooms and schools continue to grow each year.

With the increase of single-gender programs and controversy came an increase in research across the United States and throughout the world. This research would henceforth be beneficial as a way to document and provide insight into these classrooms and environments, their influence, and their impact on the students in them either positive or negative. Studies could also yield data regarding students’ single-gender classroom experiences and their post single-gender experience. McCreary (2011) stated that “despite unproven benefits and disputed constitutional status, the number of K-12 public schools offering single-sex education grew from 5 in 1995 to 547 in 2009” (p. 462). Klein (2012) noted that just as No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 focused on improving the success academically of impoverished students, especially of different ethnicities, that single-gender classrooms in the public setting are a way to improve the

academic experiences and successes, since many of the single-gender classrooms at the time of his study had predominately high proportions of students in poverty with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Along with the rapid growth in the United States, single-gender classrooms and single-gender schools have been growing in countries around the world from Pakistan to Canada (Dentith, 2008; Erarslan & Rankin, 2013).

I located and examined scholarly, peer-reviewed literature to research the past and current single-gender classrooms and schools (public and private), around the world. The goal was to locate literature detailing the impact on students via the students' perceptions of education and perceptions of self, and potentially their careers and their communities. Additionally, literature was located to explain the theoretical framework for this research focusing on the work of Bandura's (1988) social cognitive theory with an emphasis on self-efficacy.

The following chapter begins a discussion of reviewed literature with a focus on how single-gender relates to boys, to girls, and to both genders about each other. This discussion entails information on their gender differences. Next, I move the discussion towards exploring how single-gender relates to self-perceptions with both boys and girls throughout their educational years and in preparation for their futures. I will then focus specifically on the single-gender literature as it relates both to boys and girls in various grade levels (from early elementary to elementary to middle school to high school) in association with perceptions of academics and themselves. Then my focus will shift to single-gender classrooms about the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood in which the students and classrooms are located. Once each area has been focused on individually, I will focus on studies that help show how the different aspects of socioeconomic status, gender, and early elementary education integrate together. I will then specifically focus on literature with an emphasis on girls, single-gender classrooms, academics,

self-perception, and the socioeconomic status as a whole rather than as parts of the whole as they are my primary research participants. I will conclude this chapter with a summary of the literature that is currently available. I will conclude the summary with an explanation of the gap that has been located in the literature showing the need for this particular research study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective that informs this research is the social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1988) explained social cognitive theory as “behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that impact each other” (p. 276). Bandura established the social cognitive theory in 1986, and it came out of his prior social learning theory (SLT) of 1977 which explained how behavior is often learned through the observations of others and how those behaviors are either reinforced or not by those around them (Bandura, 1988). Spiropoulos (2010) explained Bandura’s social cognitive theory regarding the interaction of an individual’s thoughts and cognitive behaviors, the impact of their environment, and the impact of each other. Pajares (2002) stated “from this [social cognitive] theoretical perspective; human functioning is viewed as the product of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences” (para. 2).

Thus when thinking about the SCT and its influences, it leads to question if a particular time in life lends itself to the influences more than another time in life. Bussey and Bandura (1999) discussed how SCT gender role development is not simply something that happens only in certain early developmental years but how it is a lifelong event through which social interactions and observations of peers impact one's development. Thus, researchers, such as Pajares (2002) and Bussey and Bandura (1999), explain how SCT grants people the opportunity to work together for the good of all but yet give individuals the opportunity to be involved in

creating their future and developments based upon social and environmental interactions.

Pajares (2002) explains how SCT directly supports teachers as they work to improve the personal, behavioral, and environmental factors which increase the development of their students in the classroom. Therefore, teachers using single-gender education as a strategy to improve these factors for their students could provide their students the opportunity to shape their development and futures in a way that could change not only their current perceptions of academics and themselves but also their future perceptions as well (Erarslan & Rankin, 2013).

The instructional strategy of implementing single-gender classrooms can impact their education and future. The experiences can impact a student's self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997) and explained by Pajares (2002), self-efficacy is a person's ability and belief system that they can alter their outcomes in life-based upon the way they motivate themselves, take care of their well-being, and produce the accomplishments they pursue in life. Self-efficacy is highly associated with and at the heart of the SCT in that it allows learners to believe that they can learn academically, socially, and individually and apply what they have learned to their life both now and in the future. Bandura (1988) explained the four main sources of perceived self-efficacy as mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological state. Mastery experiences occur when as an individual one is resilient in their efforts to "persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks" (Bandura, 1994, p. 72). Bandura (1994) explained that building self-efficacy through vicarious experiences is when one sees people who are similar to them modeling successes or failures and their efforts. He continued to note how "the greater the assumed similarity, the more persuasive are the models' successes and failures" (Bandura, 1994, p. 72). Social persuasion is the hardest way to instill self-efficacy as it involves convincing one through verbal persuasion that they can do something

because they have the capabilities to do so (Bandura, 1994). He explained how one's physiological state impacts their self-efficacy by their psychical and emotional responses. Bandura (1994) stated "it is not the sheer intensity of emotional and physical reactions that is important but rather how they are perceived and interpreted" (p. 73).

When focusing on the early elementary classroom environment, all four sources of Bandura's (1994) self-efficacy are focused in the environment, thus giving an opportunity for self-efficacy to be promoted in the perceptions of those in the classroom. Early elementary single-gender classrooms could promote positive perceptions of academics and themselves for those students based on this definition of self-efficacy.

Through individual interviews, focus groups, and observations, of students, their parents, their teachers, and the school principal, I described how single-gender classrooms in the early elementary years affect girls from low- socioeconomic backgrounds and their perceptions of education and themselves. Participants will share how their perceptions were created and maintained while in a single-gender environment. However, it is important to realize that while certain factors (low-socioeconomic levels and familial structures) can and do affect perceptions, that behavior is not directly affected by these factors. (Pajares, 2002). Bussey and Bandura (1999) stated, "The remarkable capability for symbolization provides a powerful tool for comprehending the environment and for creating and regulating environmental conditions that touch virtually every aspect of life" (p. 683).

Therefore, I described the experiences of the participants, young girls and their parents (from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods that have been educated in single-gender classrooms in one school), regarding their perceptions of education and themselves. This framework also focused on how people learn through a variety of experiences and it was through these

experiences that they were capable of impacting their current and future situations (Pajares, 2002). These attitudes could be impacted which led to impacts on perceptions thus possibly changing their future and maybe ending the cycle of poverty which occurs in many of their families. It is in the social cognitive theory that “teachers...improve their students’ emotional states and to correct their faulty self-beliefs and habits of thinking . . . improve their academic skills and self-regulatory practices, and alter the school and classroom structures that may work to undermine student success” (Pajares, 2002, para. 2). Another way students are impacted in their environments is through their peers. Vygotsky (1978) discussed how his zone of proximal development (ZPD) aids students in the process of maturation and development through their peers and environment. In his, discussion of Vygotsky, Miller (2011) stated that ZPD is a way to “collaborate with a child to help him move from where he is now to where he can be with help. This person accomplishes this feat using prompts, clues, modeling, explanation, and leading” (p. 175). Brown’s (2013) dissertation on the effects of single-gender classrooms on reading achievement of boys pointed to Vygotsky’s social development theory to describe how “the male students in single-gendered classrooms were able to develop these communication tools by being able to have more shared experiences with individuals of the same gender” and thus was “key to helping them develop improved thinking skills” (p. 86). Vygotsky (1978) believed that through “collaboration with more capable peers” under the supervision of “adult guidance” that students could create meaning and focus on building his/her abilities to problem solve in the future (p. 86). Therefore, in a single-gender classroom environment with specific teacher guidance, students can work together with peers to build their self-efficacy and thus impact their current and future perceptions of education and themselves.

Related Literature

Single-Gender Education in Relation to Boys vs. Girls

Single-gender education is effective academically for both girls and boys, but in different ways and at different stages of their education. Both genders learn differently and therefore academic success in single-gender classes is based upon how academics are being taught. Specifically, research points to how single-gender classrooms can customize the learning of the boys and/or girls in the classrooms to meet that genders' strengths and based upon both brain make-up and instructional strategies (Rex & Chadwell, 2009).

McTaggart (2009) explained "experience suggests boys and girls learn differently, and research verifies it" (p. 17). McTaggart (2009) continued to show how "parents say their young kids (K-8) feel more comfortable with same-gender students" (p. 19). Thus leading proponents to see that if the students are more comfortable with the same gender at a young age and research shows that the genders learn differently, then why would schools not separate the genders in classrooms at the early ages? Another proponent of single-gender education is Schneeweis and Zweimuller (2012) who believed that "co-educational settings appear to reinforce gender stereotypes, while single-sex schooling gives more freedom in exploring interests and abilities, especially for female students" (p. 497).

All of the students in single-gender classrooms and/or schools received equitable services such as curriculum and standards; however, the instructional strategies varied between boys and the girls' classrooms (Rex & Chadwell, 2009). Chadwell (n.d.) shared examples of varying instructional strategies and differentiation between girls and boys in ways that helped each to be successful at the same curriculum but yet in ways that met their unique needs. For example, in the boys' classroom, there was more movement, but the structure and the boys were given

specific step by step directions to create bulleted study guides while the girls' classroom allowed the girl's opportunities to verbalize, discuss with peers, and make connections about their content.

In a study conducted by Smith et al. (2014), they shared that “children as young as 6 to 8 years of age [were] beginning to exclude particular career choices due to perceptions about sex type appropriateness” (p. 7). Bonomo (2010) shared how these learning differences and/or styles could and should impact how the students of both genders are educated thus preparing them for future careers and life. As students prepare for their future, it is vital that they are given every opportunity beginning from a young age to grow in ways that prepare them to become successful members of their communities. Chadwell (2007) stated there are many differences in boys and girls and that these differences “can have academic, social, physical, and emotional implications. Single-gender programs provide teachers with the opportunity to engage these differences to the benefit of their students” (p. 2). However, since single-gender classrooms are relatively new to the United States, McTaggart (2009) looked at strategies from single-gender classrooms and schools in other countries and how they could be replicated in the United States.

According to Ross, Bruce, and Scott (2012), “By overly strengthening students' self-beliefs and beliefs about mathematics learning, the gender gap in effect, and its negative impact on females' participating in engagement in mathematics, can be reduced” (p. 284). Elmore and Oyserman (2012) researched 149 students, both males, and females, in the eighth grade. Elmore and Oyserman (2012) focused upon how the students perceived their academics and futures with the manipulation of gender. These findings pointed to how the students were impacted with their responses when there were cues to their own gender or the opposite gender and that as these cues fluctuate, then their perceptions will also change accordingly. They drew the conclusion that

“boys’ and girls’ identities and behavioral responses are likely to fit the sense they make of gender” (Elmore & Oyserman, 2012, p. 184).

It is not just gendered specific strategies, but as Bonomo (2010) noticed, it is how the genders differ based on brain make-up. The brain make-up (physical and biological differences) makes the various instructional strategies work for each of the genders. Sullivan (2009) noted that students involved in single-gender education had higher academic self-perceptions. One quantitative study explained how educators find that students involved in single-gender classrooms have higher academic success than those not in a single-gender setting (Fry, 2009). A major proponent to this line of thinking is developed in Sax (2007). Sax (2007) explained that girls and boys learn differently based upon their gender differences in the areas in which their brains are structured differently.

In an article written by Durston, Hilleke, Pol, Casey, Giedd, Buitelaar, and Van Engleland (2001), it stated that according to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), brains of boys and girls are different from one another based on gender and development/age. They went on to describe the differences including how male brains are typically 10% larger than female brains. Additionally, Durston et al. (2001) explained that the white matter volume in the brain does increase and change with age. They noted that the caudate in the brain is larger in girls and the amygdala is larger in boys. Based on their discussions, these differences amongst the physical brain provides correlations to behavior and academics (Durston, et al., 2001). This information was corroborated by Schmithorst and Holland (2006) as they noted that differences in regions of the brain between genders as noted on an MRI showed a correlation between intelligence and neuroanatomical trajectories in the brain.

Due to the brain research that boys and girls brains are different, researchers focused on how different strategies would work for each gender. Malik and Mirza (2014) and Sax (2007) provided feedback in their studies stating students found that single-gender strategies positively affected their academic abilities. When focusing on how boys and girls learn differently and thus impacting their academic abilities, some researchers point to the brain differences between girls and boys (Piechura-Couture, Hens, & Tichenor, 2013; Sax, 2007). Sax (2007) described in detail how boys and girls are innately different based on how they are physically made. For example, differences are vast and varied from how they perceive sounds to how their brains react to different colors. Chadwell (n.d.) shared how two of the main concepts that need to be examined, based upon these differences in a classroom, are that of structure and connection.

Related to the differences between boys and girls learning differently, Chadwell (2007) described how boys thrive with strategies such as “abbreviated, bulleted set of instructions” and “problem-based learning” while girls thrive with “project-based learning” and “connections to real world” and time to “explain instructional processes, answer their questions, [and] consider their suggestions” (p. 2). Chadwell (2008) noted how single-gender education is a tool, a strategy, for differentiating the learning of boys and girls alike so that as educators we can meet the needs of all students individually and to “expand opportunities for students, not to limit them” (p. 2). Thus suggesting that if the students in single-gender classrooms are taught the way their brains are wired, then they should have positive academic success (Sax, 2007).

Single-Gender Education in Relation to Boys

The majority of literature associated with single-gender education classes leans heavily on classes of boys rather than classes of girls. Thus, the literature leads researchers to question why it leans more towards boys than girls. Frean (2008) quoted Leonard Sax in an interview

explaining that educators often make it so that “in the co-educational classroom so many of the choices we make are to the advantage of girls, but to the disadvantage of boys” (p. 1). This disadvantage to boys could explain how Sax (2007) noted the percentage of boys entering college had decreased from 70% to 42% from 1949-2006.

Focusing upon the disadvantage of boys in the public education system, Mitchell and Stewart (2013) focused on how “the educational achievement gap that confronts African American males in America’s public school's mandates that educators and policy makers continue the active examination of the potential benefits of such interventions” (p. 382). Thus, such an intervention would most likely include single-gender classrooms for boys. Mitchell and Stewart (2013) further explained their belief that “there is a growing interest in exploring the potential usefulness of all-male academies as a vehicle for improving the educational outcomes and futures of African-American males” (p. 389). They continued to share about the literature reviewed as it established the need for all-male classrooms or academies, especially including African American males. Thus not only helping to build the academic skills of African American males but also help them with racial and cultural concerns.

To explain why single-gender classrooms were needed for males, Sax (2006) described how boys are different from girls in their sight, hearing, chemical composition, and among other non-brain differences. Chadwell (n.d) explained further that boys are often more physically active than girls and their self-control develops later than girls. So if boys and girls differ in their learning styles due to physical attributes such as sight and hearing, as well as, different social and emotional attributes, then researchers and educators need to look to see if educating them separately would increase their academic achievements and self-perceptions.

In a study completed by Piechura-Couture et al. (2013), they looked to see if single-gender classrooms could reduce the over-representation of boys in special education classrooms. The conclusion was drawn from approximately 2200 students, 178 parents, 181 teachers, and over 41 elementary schools that “single-gender classrooms in which teachers have boy-friendly lessons that allow for greater physical movement, elevated noise levels, and direct teacher talk have proven successful for many students” (Piechura-Couture et al., 2013, p. 241). Malik and Mirza (2014) demonstrated that using single-gender classrooms as an intervention for boys is not just helping in special education classrooms, but in the regular education single-gender classrooms as well. These studies show that single-gender classrooms have proven to not only benefit boys in regular education but also benefit those in special education, thus impacting the future of these boys.

Single-Gender Education in Relation to Girls

Girls are often referred to as the ones who are good at school and the ones to whom learning and academics come easily. However, when focusing on math and science, in particular, girls are not as academically advanced and secure as their male counterparts (Smith et al., 2014 and Brown & Ronau, 2012). Girls, just like boys, have specific needs in a classroom (both extrinsically and intrinsically) that will help them develop, not just academically but also grow personally with positive self-perceptions. This was highlighted by Spearman and Watt (2013) as yet another gender difference in how boys and girls learn differently. They noted that their study reflected “results [which] highlight the importance of a structured classroom environment for girls’ extrinsic utility values for learning science” (p. 230).

Another example of the need for classrooms specifically designed for girls is Tambo, et al. (2011) and their study of 90 high school aged girls that stated that “as our world grows, even

more, dependent on technologically driven competencies, girls' participation in mathematics effects future career and economic opportunities" (p. 3897). Tambo, et al. (2011) continued to explain the importance of educating girls in mathematics:

By educating girls in mathematics classes where only girls are present, and by presenting mathematics courses in a way that overtly dismisses the claim that mathematics are for boys, girls may be able to achieve better results in mathematics, and may develop a more positive attitude towards the subject. (p. 3899)

Therefore, many single-gender classrooms and schools have been created for girls in middle school and high schools both in the United States and around the world to focus specifically on increasing academic achievement in mathematics and science (Ross, Bruce & Scott, 2012). Huang (2013) reviewed 187 studies for his meta-analysis about gender (both boys and girls) and its impact on self-efficacy towards academics. He noted that there needed to be further research focusing on the way gender affects students across their life span by focusing specifically on different stages in their school years. Thus, I began to locate research on how gender, specifically with girls, affected their academics across a variety of ages and grade levels. However, I could not locate studies researching increasing overall academics or academics other than science and mathematics with girls and only one study in science and mathematics at the elementary or early elementary school level. Consequently, this gap in the literature suggested that more research is needed with an emphasis on girls at the elementary and early elementary levels. Further research is also suggested across all academic areas instead of the inclusion of just science and mathematics.

Much like boys, the majority of single-gender classrooms for girls are found in middle, and high school levels and these are for science and mathematics (Eisele et al., 2009; Patterson & Pahlke, 2011; Schneewei & Zweimuller, 2012; Erarslan & Rankin, 2013; Elmore & Oyserman, 2012; & Hart, 2015). However, there is more to a girl's education than simply enhancing her academic achievement in two subjects and waiting until middle and high school to do so. Girls need to enhance academics in all subjects, and as Rex and Chadwell (2009) share, they learn differently than males and need to be taught in a way that best meets their learning needs. Chadwell (n.d) discusses the need for girls to verbalize with one another while making connections to content in real-life examples.

A literature review compiled by Belfi, DeFraine, Goos, and Van Damme (2012) summarized a total of 19 different studies with 9 of the studies being in single-gender environments while the others were ability groups in coeducational settings. The researchers found that the girls improved their academic self-concept when they were in the single-gender classroom while the girls in coeducational classrooms believed they had to fulfill academic expectations while at the same time fulfilling their personal needs to socialize and be included in the group. They also noted that girls felt and/or perceived that they belonged and were more accepted in the single-gender classrooms over the coeducational classrooms. Hart (2015) conducted a three-year study of 109 girls in sixth-grade classrooms. Her research focused on the comparison of attitudes towards academics and school in general between girls in single-gender classrooms and those in coeducational classrooms. In this study, the girls that were in single-gender classrooms had higher satisfaction with school in general over those in the coeducational classrooms. Hart (2015) noted that as girls have difficulties with adolescence that single-gender classrooms "may ultimately prove to be more beneficial than any instructional strategy" (p. 44).

These studies have shown the importance of single-gender classrooms for girls concerning their satisfaction in school and with improving self-perceptions.

In addition, girls, in particular, are often found to have low self-esteem or self-efficacy when it comes to both academics and themselves (Dentith, 2008). Therefore, if self-efficacy in academics is enhanced through single-gender programs, then studies could show if self-efficacy would then be enhanced as well through the single-gender programs. Aikman and Rao (2012) reviewed qualitative studies on the way education impacts gender equality and girls' education. They discussed how girls have low self-images and beliefs about themselves often from gender identities that are socially introduced and thus lead them to believe that they are not as capable as boys academically or in life in general. Aikman and Rao (2012) further discuss the importance of changing the messages that girls receive (from their families, peers, teachers, and communities) towards what their roles are or should be to messages impacting ways they can grow academically. They further discuss how single-gender classrooms can negate the "social conditions which had previously undermined girls' performances" (Aikman & Rao, 2012, p. 222). For example, Aikman and Rao (2012) shared how girls are taught their roles in mathematics that are lower than those of boys; thus female mathematics teachers believe and often model lower self-esteem in mathematics to their students than what exists.

Single-Gender Education in Relation to Perception of Self

The impact of single-gender classrooms was evident on self-perceptions as well as academics in the literature reviewed. According to Eisele et al. (2009), "few studies have addressed the non-academic specific domains of self-perceptions in school bonding and academic achievement or gone beyond identifying gender differences to determine the underlying factors that mediate gender" (p. 790).

As studies were researched on the topic of perceptions, the studies located related to girls more often than boys. When focusing on self-perceptions, Dentith (2008) noted that although some of the smartest and most “hard working girls” in high school are still some of the least “self-assured” girls (p. 145). These girls reported that they took harder advanced placement classes when they knew it would benefit grade point averages and scholarship opportunities. They were capable but indicated that they needed extra encouragement to assure themselves that they should sign up. As high school girls, who are fully capable, share their self-perceptions of being unsure of themselves, it causes researchers to begin questioning and thus searching to find if those same self-perceptions exist at younger ages and if so, what impacts those perceptions of self. One such study by Cvencek et al. (2011) showed that children as early as first grade (girls in particular) shared their beliefs of being weaker in math even though there were no differences in achievement to date. This suggests implications that stereotypes from the world around them do impact their beliefs from an early age.

Related to those stereotypes, Bandura (1988) discussed perceived self-efficacy and that “success requires not only skills but also strong self-belief in one’s capabilities to exercise control over events to accomplish desired goals” (p. 279). A study completed by Hart (2014) stated, “given that self-esteem is so heavily shaped by adolescent experiences and specifically by peer interactions, it would seem that efforts made to increase adolescent self-esteem through focused social interactions may have higher levels of success” (p. 26). A study by Osmanaga (2014) measured the perceptions of 209 students towards their own self-esteem. In this study, the students believed positive self-esteem was due to support from both their families and their social environments as well as “their confidence and strength to face problems” whereas negative self-esteem stemmed from traumas, life difficulties, and “lack of self-confidence”

(Osmanaga, 2014, pp. 293-294). This research concluded that a student's environment could build or tear down their self-confidence; therefore, leading educators to research if environments such as single-gender classrooms would impact the self-esteem of their students.

A qualitative study by Glasser (2012) focused on a school with 941 students in middle school. Glasser interviewed the 62 students and two teachers from the single-gender classrooms. Through this case study, Glasser wanted to research how single-gender classrooms at the middle school level affected the students and their perceptions of self. The study concluded that single-gender classroom settings are a way for the students in these classrooms to grow in their identities and self and thus create perceptions and expectations of self and others, although the single-gender classrooms can affect boys and girls differently in relation to one another and also in social and academic areas.

In the literature, I reviewed, the majority of the studies focused on the perceptions of self of the girls themselves. A study of 95 parents of early elementary and elementary school aged students (first, second, third, and fifth grades) focused upon how the parents themselves felt about the way single-gender environment impacted their students' perceptions of self (Tichenor, Tichenor, Piechura-Couture, & Heins, 2013). Overall, the parents reported increases in self-confidence, motivation, self-esteem, independence, self-efficacy, attitude towards school, behavior, and grades for their students in the single-gender classrooms. Parents of girls reported higher positive changes than parents of boys; however, all areas were above 72% positive change and as high as a 93% positive change (Tiechnor, et al., 2012). The study concluded that 86% of the parents would want their student to further their education in a single-gender classroom due to the benefits they see their students gained from the experiences from academics to self-perceptions to behaviors. Tiechnor, et al. (2012) did note that "further research should

incorporate parents from multiple schools that utilize the single-gender classroom model” (p. 13).

Chan et al. (2011) had 16 middle school girls identify pictures from the media that showed how they perceived themselves. The researchers found through this qualitative study that these perceptions initiated by the media and society helped shape the perceptions of the students. When students, especially girls, have these pre-conceived perceptions about self and their education and future, it is often hard to change those that are inaccurate (Chan, et al., 2011). Since studies show it is hard to change these perceptions once students are at the middle or high school age, then studies need to look to see if they can be altered at an earlier stage in life. Spearman and Watt (2013) researched how classroom environments assist in shaping the perceptions in the classroom and thus the perceptions of the students in them. They studied 46 female students (ages 11 to 14) and four of their teachers. Spearman and Watt (2013) noted how “girls’ perceptions were particularly influential” and that perceptions could be impacted both positively and negatively by the environment they are in (p. 235). They further discussed how research continues to show a decline in student values and expectancies as they go throughout school but that the largest and quickest decline happens in the early elementary years. Therefore, the limited amount of literature on self-perceptions at the early elementary and elementary school levels leads the researcher to see a significance for the further study of gender and self-perceptions at the early elementary level.

Rudy, May, Matthews, and Davis III (2013) also studied 126 students aged 11 to 14. They found that negative self-talk (expressing negative thoughts towards oneself) created negative self-efficacy and thus they set out to study the relationships and associations that encompassed this type of self-talk. Their results indicated that there was a “significant

association between negative self-statements and self-efficacy” and the students were more likely to make this connection with relationships of family and peers than when with strangers (Rudy, et al., 2013, p. 111). Thus, it is important for students to build positive self-perceptions in those relationships that are closest to them: their family, their peers, and their classmates, to prevent the negative self-talk and create positive perceptions.

In single-gender education classrooms, Cremin and Nakabugo (2012) focused on how a student’s development evolves from a variety of sources including education, family, community, and economics. Classroom environment along with the perceptions of that environment and those in it prove to be influential in shaping the perceptions of self for the girls in it (Spearman & Watt, 2013). Tambo et al. (2011) stated that “while many educational or social factors may be influencing their reluctance to do so, understanding how the type of school affects girls’ self-perception of their mathematical abilities is important” (p. 3900). The theme that emerged from this section of research was how girls, in particular, look at themselves and their education and create their perceptions of self. The combined research of Cremin and Nakabugo (2012), Spearman and Watt (2013), and Tambo et al. (2011) point to the fact that these perceptions of self are shaped by many different factors in a person’s environment and the shaping of these perceptions start at a young age.

Single-Gender Education in Relation to Age/Grade Levels

I found the majority of reviewed literature related to students of middle and high school ages rather than elementary (third-fifth) or early elementary (preschool-second) grade levels. Malik and Mirza (2014) introduced how students learn quickly in the early years as they figure out their identities and how they fit into the world around them. Malik and Mirza (2014) stated, “patterns established at this stage [early years] have far-reaching implications for the future life”

and “during these [early] years that children realize their identity and their relationship to the external world” (p. 2). Patterson (2012) agreed with Malik and Mirza (2014) stating that “young elementary-school-aged children use their knowledge of cultural gender roles to make subjective judgments regarding the self, and conversely, that views of the self may influence personal endorsement of cultural gender stereotypes” (p. 422). These researchers shared how during these important first years students develop patterns that will impact the students’ future lives. This impact was noted as well by Lee and Otaiba (2015) when they concluded: “gender interacts with SES [socioeconomic status] much earlier than Grade 2” (p. 55). One of the few located studies with an emphasis on the elementary and early elementary levels was one conducted by Kohlhass et al. (2010); they focused specifically on fifth-grade students and their science performance. They looked at three separate variables (gender, ethnicity, and poverty) working together to affect the academic data of the students.

Although not specifically related to single-gender education, Lee and Bierman (2015) studied the transition of 164 students from Head Start to kindergarten to show how the classroom environment played a vital role in academics and behaviors, both positively and negatively, of students from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. They explained the importance of how “a positive experience in kindergarten may play a particularly important role in fostering the behavioral adjustment and learning necessary for school success” (p. 383).

The researchers continued by noting the importance for further studies in the early elementary realm and over time in relation to socioeconomic status and gender to see if the academic patterns they noted continued over the years. Also, the limited amount of literature on the single-gender education of younger students suggests first that the number of single-gender classrooms in early elementary and/or elementary schools has been minimal. Secondly, the

limited research may relate to the difficulty of collecting data from younger students. Finally, it indicates that there is a need for more research to be conducted, both quantitatively and qualitatively, on elementary and/or early elementary levels.

Single-Gender Education in Relation to Low-Socioeconomic Neighborhoods

The last individual theme I noticed in the literature dealt with the level of poverty in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. Specifically, the studies focused on the impact of the single-gender classrooms in the neighborhood to the students living in them. The literature reviewed to shed light on how programs such as single-gender classrooms can foster both the increase of academic levels and perceptions of education along with perceptions of self for those students living at or below the poverty level. Studies in this theme ranged from early elementary preschool programs to the juvenile justice system and how poverty intertwines with perceptions of education and self and single-gender classrooms.

According to Erarslan and Rankin (2013), “the basic tenant of socialization theory is that values and attitudes are transmitted from the family to the children” (p. 458). Erarslan and Rankin (2013) studied 295 high school, senior girls. Their research connected the attitudes and values of gender roles passed down in families of high school aged, African American female students with the socioeconomic status of the families and thus the neighborhoods that serve the schools. However, in their study “family income, on the other hand, was more significant in affecting girls’ attitudes toward work and social life” than any other single home factor (Erarslan & Ranking, 2013, p. 464). The girls in this study, like many high school girls from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, have learned and internalized these values and gender role attitudes which are passed down in families. The key is to gain a deeper understanding of about

these values of negative socioeconomic acceptance as they are revised and/or altered, which therefore may significantly impact their future and the cycle of poverty.

Studies by Joo (2010), Kohlass, et al. (2010), and Lee and Bierman (2015) suggested the impact, for students and their futures, of influencing and possibly changing these attitudes at a younger age when the attitudes and values are being developed is of greater importance. The need to introduce positive gender role attitudes and at an early age in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods shows another reason for the significance of this study.

Studies over the last several years have begun to show the connection between low-socioeconomic neighborhoods and the academic perceptions and self-perceptions of the students in them (Joo, 2010; Kohlhas, et al., 2010; Navarre, 2014). Research by Navarre (2014) compared the mathematics achievement of girls in a coeducational public school with that of a single-gender school. Navarre noted how “this study found that low, socioeconomic, minority students made greater achievement gains in the single-gender setting than White, not economically disadvantaged students” (p. 96). Mihaladiz et al. (2011) studied 882 students (both males and females) in the sixth through eighth grades focusing on how their gender and family income affected their attitudes toward academics. In the study, they noted that they had found “no study looking at the effects of gender, grade level, and monthly income on the attitude towards science” thus providing another gap in the literature showing the importance of our current study (p. 2583).

Joo’s (2010) study focused on preschool-aged children enrolled in Head Start (a federally funded preschool program for children from low socio-economic neighborhoods to give them a “head start” on their education). Although this study did not focus on single-gender classrooms, it focused on how early education could help students look at their academics and self-

perceptions differently, therefore, affecting their educational and future goals accordingly. Specifically, Joo (2010) stated, “among chronically disadvantaged children, however, as shown above for persistently poor girls, the case was different;” in this case the “participant[s] generated long-term effects in their academic achievement” (p. 812). Focusing on Joo’s (2010) long term effects and how Bandura (1988) noted that “efficacy beliefs also affect the amount of stress and depression people experience in coping with environmental demands” (p. 280), girls from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods need to develop positive self-efficacy towards academics and themselves. This self-efficacy belief system was seen through a study conducted by Lee and Bierman (2015). Lee and Bierman (2015) studied 164 students leaving Head Start and transitioning to kindergarten and noted the importance of positive experiences including close relationships between the student and teacher as a necessity for those students who are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. They noted how the experiences and support in these early elementary classrooms affected how the students either grew or regressed from the Head Start setting through kindergarten, based upon each unique setting.

When focusing on low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, “half of the well-documented achievement gap for low-income Black children is already present in kindergarten, due in part to limited opportunities for acquiring foundational skills necessary for school success” (Calzada, Barajas-Gonzalez, Dawson-McClure, Huang, Palamar, Kamboukos, & Brotman, 2015, p. 1159). By noting the importance of the early elementary classroom and the environments in those classrooms, it shows how students from low socio-economic environments respond with behavior and academics and thus influencing their futures.

Schneeweis and Zweimuller (2012) found “results also corroborate the general findings from the literature that especially females react to their environment” (p. 497). Realizing that

females react more to their environments than males caused me to search for further studies showing the types of reactions females had to their environments, especially in single-gender environments. Piechura-Couture et al. (2013) noted in their study of 2200 students that those from a low- socioeconomic neighborhood often showed a “noteworthy result [of how] single-gender classes appear to have greater impacts for African-American females” (p. 241). Jones and Presler-Marshall (2012) discussed the importance of giving a voice to these girls and young women to help reduce and/or eradicate poverty that they are living in already. They go on to explain how young girls are at a “critical time in their lives [which] can reinforce their poverty status and that of their offspring or impact their movement into or out of poverty” (Jones & Presler-Marshall, 2012, p. 371). Suggestions made for helping to give these girls a voice include girls’ clubs which can help to keep the girls in school and on the right path academically thus helping to prevent the chronic poverty in which they are living. Then, when building a community in a single-gender classroom of girls, they are essentially creating a girls’ club that would thus build the self-efficacy mentioned earlier in the literature review and thus help to promote the academics and confidence, therefore possibly aiding in the end of the poverty cycle (Jones & Presler-Marshall, 2012).

A qualitative case study by Yelgun and Karaman (2015) noted how the low-socio-economic status of a family has the highest negative effect on the academic achievement of a student. Yelgun and Karaman (2015) further discussed that in addition to low-socioeconomic status, the second highest negative effect on academic achievement is the student profile of personal attitudes towards education. However, these two go hand in hand. If the family is struggling financially, then the attitudes and personal expectations of the students are going to look different than those of higher socioeconomic statuses.

Focusing on the self-efficacy needs of girls living in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods and the studies by Scheneeweis and Zweimuller (2012) along with Joo (2010) and Piechura-Couture et al. (2013), the data are showing that self-efficacy is a need which is beginning to be nurtured through environments such as single-gender classrooms. A study of 295 high school seniors in Istanbul looked at how gender role attitudes differed in single-sex and coeducational schools (Erarslan & Rankin, 2013). In the study, two of the high schools were in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, and two were in high-socioeconomic neighborhoods. Erarslan and Rankin (2013) discussed that “since this study shows that the SES [socioeconomic status] composition of the neighborhood and school made a difference in gender role attitudes, the context in which girls’ schools are located needs to be evaluated carefully” (p. 464). This study indicated that in the low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, the single-gender girls’ schools did impact the attitudes of the girls at the high school level.

On the opposite end of the preschool, Head Start literature presented by Joo (2010) is the juvenile justice system. Chesney-Lind et al. (2008) researched how girls need programs that allow them to discuss and grow with their perceptions. The girls described programs that work and that did not work. It is important for girls, especially, to share their beliefs and perceptions, so future programs are created that will be effective in helping to create positive perceptions towards education and self. Chesney-Lind et al. (2008) shared how “the lack of programs to prevent and help delinquency in girls is part of a broader historically rooted pattern in the United States” (p. 169). They discussed how in the available programs that the majority “provide far more options for boys than for girls” (Chesney-Lind et al., 2008, p. 169). Therefore, if girls participate in effective programs, classes, or educational settings where they learn how to develop positive self-perceptions along with their academic studies suited best for how they

learn, then there is an opportunity to start breaking the poverty cycle. However, change must start early. By waiting, until they are in a juvenile justice system to begin instilling these academics and perceptions, then is it too late. Snell et al. (2012) sum up the significance of this study in a low-socioeconomic neighborhood:

Neighborhood is one important aspect of youth's social context and plays an important role in affording youth positive opportunities to be autonomous, accomplish socially valued goals, and develop a healthy identity. However, residing in a high-poverty neighborhood increases the likelihood of a developmental mismatch, in which the needed opportunities for developmental growth are fewer and more difficult to access. Thus, developmental theory suggests that residing in a high-poverty neighborhood is likely to compromise the development of adolescents, increase problems behavior, as well as decrease positive adjustment, such as academic achievement. (p. 358)

The literature examination further revealed how students living in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods made relative gains in their perceptions of academics and self both at the middle and high school levels in comparison to those of their middle to high-socioeconomic peers. Seeing that students from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods grew more than their higher socioeconomic counterparts in areas such as academics and self-perception suggested the need to explore the connection between socioeconomic status and single-gender classrooms further. Also, since the positive growth was documented in the middle to high school students, information suggests that the growth could be greater for early elementary students who in general grow more quickly in academics and perceptions of self. Therefore, since current research showed how single-gender classrooms could affect the academics and perceptions of students at the high school and middle school levels and particularly in low-socioeconomic

neighborhoods, then it would be important to research the implications it could make at an early elementary level. The significance of such a study would describe how single-gender education can impact those beliefs from an early age. Then, through the study, participants could describe how the single-gender classrooms changed their perceptions towards education and themselves but also the impact on their future and their community.

Girls in Early Elementary Grade Levels from Low-socioeconomic Neighborhoods

I noted six different individual themes that emerged from the literature which point to the need for further research of single-gender females in the early elementary levels and from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. However, further research needs to focus not only on the individual themes but also an integration of the themes. Goodkind (2013), noted in her literature review that there was a lack of research focusing on single-gender in poverty in the United States.

One research study conducted by Kohlhaas et al. (2010) reviewed how gender, ethnicity, and poverty affected fifth-grade science scores. In the study, all three of the variables “contributed significantly”; however, “the largest gap is found in the three-way interaction which reveals a six point gap between White males ‘at/above poverty’ and African American females ‘below poverty’” (Kohlhaas, et al., 2010, p. 9). These findings concluded that African American girls who were in the lowest poverty level had the lowest scores in science and “below poverty females are the most vulnerable group” (Kohlhaas, et al., 2010, p. 9). Seeing how gender and low-socioeconomic status impact the academics of the students in this study leads to the importance of further studies at the early elementary years to describe how single-gender classrooms do impact the academics and perceptions of self.

Lee and Otaiba (2015) conducted research focused on 462 kindergarteners from a variety of backgrounds, in a southeastern United States city, to note how socioeconomic status and gender affect academics specifically in the area of literacy. In their findings, they “confirm[ed] that the poverty and the gender gaps in literacy achievement begin early, but the poverty and gender gaps in early literacy skills are more nuanced than previously reported” (Lee & Otaiba, 2015, p. 54). A longitudinal study of kindergarteners by Bratter and Kimbro (2013) focused on multiracial children and poverty. Although the literature focuses on multiracial children of poverty, in particular, writers discussed how for students (children) to build resilience both in themselves and in their families that self-efficacy and self-esteem needed to be promoted. Bratter and Kimbro (2013) went on to clarify the importance of “a strong community life comes in the form of ensuring the children have contact with peers and role models” which in turn would promote this positive self-perception and academics, thus helping to create the “stable environments” needed to change the cycle of poverty (p. 187).

Many studies noted the need for further research and focus on how to eliminate the cyclical pattern of poverty that often exists in the familiar structures in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods (Bratter & Kimbro, 2013; Goodkind, 2013; Joo, 2010; and Kohlass, et al., 2010). I found literature that described how the poverty cycle could be broken by really focusing on the perceptions of students and in making sure that there are programs that keep students from falling through the gaps. According to Joo (2010) and Smith, et al. (2014), programs (such as Head Start and STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics]) and gender specific focuses (such as single-gender classrooms) seem to affect the outcome of how girls look at their education and their perceptions of themselves. The study by Kohlhass, et al. (2010) explained about how gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status intertwined and impacted

academics as a set more than they do individually. Studies such as Kohlass, et al. (2010) reveal the need and significance of this current study which focuses on the impacts early elementary, single-gender classrooms in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods have upon the perceptions of girls towards their academics and themselves.

Summary

In my literature review, I found an increase in single-gender education studies since the 2006 Title IX law for Single-Sex Public Education passed in 2006 legalizing the classes in public schools, (Kiseleich, 2008). Studies after the passage of the new law provided insight into single-gender classrooms and their impact on students' perceptions of education and themselves, their futures, and their communities. However, the majority of the research is focused on independent factors in single-gender studies. These independent factors are primarily focused on boys, not girls, African-Americans over other ethnicities, middle and high school students over early elementary or elementary aged students, academics over self-esteem or perceptions of self, schools across the world over those in the United States, and little reference to low-socioeconomic neighborhoods in direct relation to single-gender. .

The literature primarily focused on boys. Specifically, the studies focused on graduation rates of African American males and concluded that single-gender classrooms help these young men improve their perceptions of academics, increasing their grades and graduation rates. Mitchell and Stewart (2011) showed these same young men improved both their academic futures and their destinies (college, marriage, and careers). Other studies focused on how to keep boys out of special education, as boys are over-represented in the special education arena as compared to girls (Piechura-Couture et al., 2013)

Research on girls was limited primarily to high school students in association with science and mathematics. However, four studies (Kohlhass, et al., 2010; Malik & Mirza, 2014; Mihaladiz, Duran, & Dogan, 2011; & Patterson, 2012) focused on elementary girls, connecting gender and poverty. These studies all addressed academics, with Patterson (2012) focusing on gender and the knowledge of gender roles from those around them were being used to “make judgments about the self” in addition to academics (p. 430). Kohlhass et al. (2010) addressed how low-socioeconomic status, gender, and early elementary classrooms intertwined.

Belfi et al. (2012) shared the importance and need for research on single-gender education, as they stated:

Class compositions by ability and gender are of course only two of the many aspects of a secondary school’s classroom environment. Nonetheless, our review shows that they play an important role in students’ school well-being and academic self-concept and that their influence should not be overlooked. (p. 69)

Therefore, the focus of my qualitative case study will be girls from a low-socioeconomic neighborhood with single-gender early elementary experiences. The gap in literature was found where early elementary settings, girls, low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, and single-gender classrooms intertwine. The goal is to have the participants share their stories and descriptions to gain an understanding of the impact of single-gender early elementary classrooms. Further research suggested the need to include parental reflections and insights into how they have witnessed single-gender classrooms impacted their child. Thus, participants will include girls in single-gender classrooms, their parents, their teachers, and their principal.

Consequently, this qualitative case study will aid in furthering the current research on single-gender education while at the same time assist in filling the gaps that are currently in the literature in single-gender environments.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to describe the experiences of girls in the single-gender classrooms from low-socioeconomic backgrounds in South Carolina about their perceptions of education and themselves. The case study included participants in three categories: students in fourth and fifth grade who had been in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten, their parents, and teachers in single-gender, early elementary classrooms teachers, and the principal. Hopkins Elementary School (pseudonym), the site and boundary for the case, was a public, Title I school in South Carolina with 100% of students receiving free and reduced meals. In this chapter, I describe the data collection methods of interviews, focus groups, survey, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using coding and themes.

Design

The majority of current research regarding single-gender education was quantitative in nature; therefore, a qualitative design was chosen as a way to allow for deeper exploration of the problem at hand through thick, rich descriptions (Creswell, 2013). A single instrumental case study was the design for this study. This method was valid as it “has been tried and found to be a direct and satisfying way of adding to the experience and improving understanding” (Stake, 1978, p.6). The case study was chosen as it gave the participants an opportunity to share and describe in their own words, their real-life, first-hand experiences in single-gender classrooms (Yin, 2003). Using single-gender classrooms in this study, the participants provided a description of their experiences in a bounded system (Creswell, 2013). Through the single instrumental case study, the specific case was defined as the single-gender girls’ education program in the early elementary classrooms at Hopkins Elementary School.

The participants in this case study described their experiences and how the classes impacted their perceptions of education and self. Stake (1995) shared how a single case study is used to gain insights into a particular phenomenon (for this case the single-gender early elementary classes). Yin (2003) stated that a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (pp. 13-14). By focusing on the case study on single-gender early elementary classrooms in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, the participants described their experiences, thus helping others to understand how these classrooms impacted or shaped the perceptions of education and self of the girls in them. The findings from this study could have transferability to other single-gender early elementary classrooms in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods.

Research Questions

- CQ: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact the perceptions of girls from a low-socioeconomic neighborhood in South Carolina toward education and themselves?
- RQ1: What experiences did fourth and fifth-grade girls have in their single-gender early elementary classrooms?
- RQ2: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls’ perceptions of themselves?
- RQ3: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls’ perceptions of education?
- RQ4: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls’ future plans?

Setting

The location of this study was at Hopkins Elementary School (a pseudonym), a public, Title I elementary school in an old mill village in South Carolina. At the time of the study, Hopkins Elementary School's population included 645 students in grades K4-fifth grade. There was one four-year-old kindergarten classroom, four kindergarten classrooms, six first-grade classrooms, eight second-grade classrooms, eight third-grade classrooms, six fourth-grade classrooms, five fifth-grade classrooms, and one self-contained special education classroom. In each grade level, kindergarten through fifth grade, one classroom was single-gender girls, and one classroom was single-gender boys. The remaining classrooms at each grade level were coeducational classrooms. In addition to classroom teachers, there were eight related arts teachers, two reading interventionists, three English Language Learners teachers, three special education resource teachers, one speech therapist, one school counselor, one nurse, one Title I nurse, one mental health counselor, and one social worker. The school's leadership included one principal, one assistant principal, two instructional coaches, and one Title I facilitator. The ethnic make-up of the students included 12% Caucasian, 40% African-American, 42% Hispanic, and 6% other. Of the student population, 100% received free meals because they live at or below the poverty level.

Since 2008, Hopkins Elementary School has implemented a single-gender program. The first year (2008-2009) included kindergarten through second grade, and then the next year, third through fifth grades were added. After the second year (2009-2010), all grades included single-gender classrooms except for K4 (four-year-old kindergarten). In each grade level, one classroom was single-gender boys, one classroom was single-gender girls, and the remaining classrooms were coeducational. Due to low parental involvement, the single-gender classes were

opt-out and then students were chosen for them via a lottery system. The opt-out lottery system provided any parent that preferred their child not to be considered for a single-gender classroom a form to sign opting them out of the lottery for the single-gender classrooms. If the parents did not sign the form, then the students had the same chance of being in a single-gender classroom as they did in a coeducational classroom. To maintain data and evaluate program effectiveness of the single-gender program, administration required a core of ten students in each kindergarten; single-gender classroom continue together through fifth grade. These ten students were diverse on ethnicity, resource special education, speech, and academic levels. The school population was transient with minimal parental support such as low PTA attendance and low parent conference attendance.

Since implementing single-gender, the school has gone from only 17% meeting or exceeding standards to 65% meeting or exceeding this past school year (2014-2015). The school received an "A" report card rating from the State of South Carolina for the 2012-2013 school year and received the Silver Award and the Closing the Gap Award for the 2014-2015 school year.

The setting was purposeful due to the single-gender program it had in place and the number of years that it had participated in the program. Many schools in South Carolina only implement single-gender classrooms beginning second grade and up, or just one grade at the early elementary level. A list of schools in South Carolina that participate in single-gender education has been included in Appendix A. Thus, Hopkins Elementary School was an exceptional location to understand the impacts of early elementary, single-gender classrooms (kindergarten through second grade), had upon the girls, since single-gender classrooms were optional in kindergarten through fifth grades. It was also chosen due to the low-socioeconomic

level of the neighborhood and school. As previously mentioned, it was a Title I school with 100% of students receiving free lunch.

Participants

The participants of this case study consisted of a purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) of female students, their parents/guardians, principal, and the teachers of single-gender classrooms at Hopkins Elementary School. The student participants were fourth and/or fifth-grade girls receiving free and reduced lunch, having participated in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten, the students assented to the study (see Appendix B), and their parents/guardians consented (see Appendix C) to participate in the study. For transferability, the participants were as diverse as possible regarding ethnicity and academic levels (Patton, 2002). The parental participants were the parents of the girls participating in this study. For this study, I adopted the definition from IDEA for parents which included but is not limited to those guardians, grandparents, aunts/uncles, foster parents, or other non-biological parents that are the student's legal guardians, if they are not with their biological parents (IDEA, 2004). These parents were included in gathering data from a variety of sources about the girls; this information helped reveal how the girls were impacted by the single-gender classroom environment from the parents' point-of-view. The goal was to have both parents/guardians participate if at all possible.

Teacher participants included teachers that were currently or formerly single-gender girls' teachers from Hopkins Elementary School. The teachers represented each grade level from kindergarten to fifth grade. The teacher participation was convenience sampling as there were only twelve teachers that had taught single-gender girl classes over the last eight years. The single-gender classroom teachers were beneficial in the study since they shared their insights on not just the single-gender program but the students in the program, both those in the study and

others that had been in their classrooms. The teachers explained how they had seen their girls grow both academically and personally through the early elementary grades and into the elementary grades. As well, the principal was an important participant. He gave insight on the program from an overarching vantage point. The principal spoke to the integration of the program in regards to the building and the community as a whole.

For purposeful sampling, I chose students who spoke proficient English, as well as at least one parent that spoke proficient English, so I did not have to obtain a translator. The teacher participants were volunteer participants from the teachers who had or were currently teaching single-gender classes of the female participants. All participants provided consent, including parent consent (see Appendices B, C, and D). Also, school district (county) and school consent were procured before beginning this study (see Appendices E and F respectively). The sample size of students was seven students or until theoretical saturation had been reached (Stake, 1995). Theoretical saturation occurred, and student participants stopped being recruited and interviewed when the responses began to be repetitious and no longer provided new information to the theory being studied (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The total participants were the theoretical saturation of students (seven) plus their parents, in addition to the teachers and principal.

All participants were notified of the study via letter (students and parents) and via email (teachers and principal) with a summary of the study, an outline of the requirements of the participants, and notifying that this study was strictly voluntary, that it could not be held against them in relationship to school grades or job, and included information on how to contact me to sign up for the study if interested (see Appendices G and H respectively).

Procedures

The procedures for this study included following all protocols correctly and in order. After the study proposal was defended and accepted by the dissertation committee, then Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured (see Appendix I). It was important to note that the IRB process at Liberty University required the approval of the county (see Appendix E) before its approval. After county and IRB approval, site approval was required from Hopkins Elementary School (see Appendix F). It was important that this was secured before any data collection or analysis began.

Once IRB, the county, and the site had approved the study, the next step was to elicit participants that met the delimitation criteria. Potential participants were solicited through letters (students and parents) and/or e-mails (teachers and principal) from myself (see Appendices G and H respectively). Potential parental participants were the parents of the potential student participants. Next, I ensured a purposeful sampling of students. The sampling needed to be as diverse as possible to get a well-rounded description of the single-gender experience for the girls at Hopkins Elementary School. Each of the student participants were classified as receiving free lunch since the entire school receives free lunch due to the 100% poverty level of the school. The variation included ethnicity and academic levels. Once potential participants (students, parents, teachers and the principal) were secured, each participant signed assent and/or consent forms, then the data collection began (see Appendices B, C, & D respectively).

The data collection process included seven steps. The steps included analyzing documents, completing the first of two interviews with each student participant (see Appendix J), asking the parents to complete a demographic survey (see Appendix K), completing an interview with the parents (see Appendix L), interviewing of the teachers and principal (see Appendix M),

hosting the student focus group (see Appendix N), hosting the teacher focus group (see Appendix O), completing the second interview with each student one-on-one, and analyzing the students' writing prompts and comic strips that showed their perceptions in their own words (see Appendix P).

I kept an accurate audit trail of every part of the study, as well as memo and reflection on each part (see Appendix Q). As data were collected, I kept the data locked in a file cabinet at home. Once collection began, analysis of the data also began. However, it was important to make sure that the methods for trustworthiness were performed at the appropriate times during the study.

The Researcher's Role

In this case study, I was the human instrument (Creswell, 2013). I was the single-gender kindergarten teacher for each one of the girls in the study. I no longer had influence over their grades as they were now in fourth or fifth grade, and I was now a second-grade teacher. However, this helped with the relationship, and they were more open to the interviews and focus groups. Also, they were used to seeing me in and out of their classrooms. The parents of the girls had all met with me previously through parent-teacher conferences and had seen me around the school and thus were more open to talking with me about the program rather than a stranger completing the interviews. Since this was a community where parental support was low and parents were hesitant to share their thoughts and opinions, it was important that they knew and trusted me. Such trust had been built over the last eight years. My children attended the same school, and the students and parents all knew that they were in the single-gender program (my daughter from first through fifth grade and my son for just one year before moving to a special education school).

I realized that I had my beliefs and thoughts about the program that I must bracket out as I collected and analyzed the data. I bracketed out my own personal perceptions in regards to the single-gender program as a parent since it was a bias and since they were not from a low-socioeconomic neighborhood as this was not their home school. I was also honest when coding the interviews and focus groups and making sure that the themes emerged from the text and not from what I believed to find or not find.

Data Collection

According to Yin (2009), “a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” which is defined as data triangulation (p. 114). I used four different data collection methods in this case study. The four methods included document analysis of school and student records as well as documents the students created such as written prompts and comic strips to share their perceptions in their own words, interviews (students, parents, and teachers), surveys from the parental participants, and focus groups of the same individual interview participants (students and teachers only). I continued with data collection of participants until the data reached maximum saturation, meaning that all participants were sharing the same information and results (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Stake, 1995).

Document Analysis

Other documents such as Title I status, student test scores, neighborhood demographics, and county documents were used to give background to the case study and to corroborate information gathered from the participants during the interviews, focus groups, or survey. Yin (2012) stated how using archival records show that “a more balanced picture may then emerge” (p.13). This was important because the “most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (Yin, 2009, p. 103).

Perceptions in Their Own Words

The student participants were requested to complete written prompts and acrostic poetry on their perceptions of education and self. These were given to them after the interviews and focus groups had been held. The students also created comic strips expressing themselves in a single-gender classroom and if they participated in a coeducational classroom. This gave an idea of how students saw themselves in the two different environments. These activities were completely optional and were given to them to complete on their own time with a designated day/time to return. According to Creswell (2013) sometimes researchers need to be creative with their “innovative data collection” methods (p. 161). With young participants, this creative data collection method provided another piece to their experiences and in their own words and pictures. These documents shed light on all four research questions.

Interviews

Interviews were divided into different sections of semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2012). Yin (2011) discussed how when one interviews in a one-on-one setting that the participant can open up and share more freely about their experiences than they would in a group setting. The student participants were interviewed two times each (once before the focus group and once after) until thematic saturation (see Appendix J). Two shorter interviews with the students were chosen instead of one longer interview due to the attention span and age of the students. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), having flexibility with the sequence or order of the questions allowed for other questions to be added as needed and in this case, allowed for a good breaking point between the two smaller interviews with the students. The parents were interviewed once (see Appendix L) as were the teachers and the principal (see Appendix M).

All of the interviews were at school in the conference room and were recorded electronically via two separate devices. Using two separate devices provided a backup plan in case one failed to record. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by myself. The interview transcripts were then entered into the Atlas.ti software system for analysis. The goal of the interviews was to have each participant share their experiences while in the single-gender program during their early elementary years at Hopkins Elementary School. The parents, teachers, and principal shared their views but also what they witnessed among their daughters and students in the classrooms as well.

The purpose or goal of the interview questions was to get the students, parents, teachers, and principal to describe or explain how the single-gender classrooms had impacted the girls and their perceptions of education and self. Yin (2012) stated how “the flexible format permits open-ended interviews, if properly done, to reveal how case study participants construct reality and think about situations, not just to provide the answers to a researcher’s specific questions and own implicit construction of reality” (p.12). The parent interview was to gain insight into the way the girls had changed (if they had) and what they contributed to the change. During the parent interview, parents were asked, as well, if they had girls go through the single-gender program as well as girls that had not and to describe the differences between them (if any). The interview questions were constructed from the literature and literature gaps noted in Chapter 2: The Literature Review. The focus group questions and the second round of interviews for the girls focused on questions that surfaced during the previous data gathering opportunities such as the interviews and focus groups.

The interview questions for each set of the participants supported all four research questions in this study. To direct the conversation and keep the interview flowing, I utilized the following questions with the students.

Interview Questions for Students (see Appendix J):

Part 1

1. How would you describe your family? Friends? Neighborhood? School?
2. How would you describe for me what it was like to be in a single-gender classroom from kindergarten through second grade?
3. How would you describe for me how being in a single-gender classroom during your early elementary years influenced the way you feel about school today?
4. How did being in a single-gender classroom during this time make you feel? Was it different from third grade to fifth grade? How so?
5. Did you ask to be in the single-gender classroom beginning in kindergarten? If so, why?
6. What has been your favorite thing about being in single-gender classrooms? Why? What has been your least favorite part? Why?
7. From kindergarten to second grade, which subjects were your strengths/ which were your weaknesses? Why? As you have moved into third, fourth, and fifth grade are those subjects still your strongest and weakest or have they changed? Why?
8. How would you describe how you felt about school in kindergarten, first, and second grade?

9. How do you think your experiences in kindergarten through second grade affected how you feel about school today?
10. How did being in a single-gender classroom during this time affect how you felt about school?
11. Would you like to continue in single-gender classrooms into middle school? Why or Why not?

Part 2

12. How would you describe yourself in a few sentences?
13. How would you describe how you feel/see yourself? Have you always felt this way or has it changed? If it changed, when did it change?
14. What adjectives describe you? Are these the same adjectives that would have described you in kindergarten, first, or second grade?
15. What do you love most about yourself from the time that you were in kindergarten until you finished second grade? Is that still the thing you love most? If not, what do you love most now? Why?
16. What are some things you were really good at during your early elementary years? Are you still good at these things now? If not, what do you think has changed? When did these things change? Why?
17. How has single-gender affected how you feel about yourself?
18. Have your parents ever discussed college with you? What about teachers in kindergarten through second grade? What about teachers in third through fifth grade?
19. Do you want to go to college? Why? Where?

20. When was the first time you thought about going to college?
21. What do you want to be when you grow up? Why? Is this the same thing you wanted to do during your kindergarten through second-grade years? If not, when did it change and why?
22. Where do you want to live when you grow up? Why? Has this always been the place you wanted to live or has it changed? If it changed, when did it change and why?

Each of the above interview questions correlated to the four research questions in this case study and thus were primary data sources. Due to the ages of the student participants, the questions were simplified for their understanding and broken into two different shortened interview periods. Question one gave an overview of whom the student participant was and how she saw her neighborhood, family, school, and friends from her perspective. Pajares (2002) explained how experiences affect our perceptions. The responses to questions two through 11 gave the students the opportunity to describe the early elementary, single-gender classroom and then to explain how it affected their perceptions of education (Huang, 2013; Spearman & Watt, 2013; & Tambo, et al., 2011). Then questions 12 through 18 helped to describe their single-gender experiences further while sharing how those experiences had affected their perceptions of self (Eisele et al., 2009; Hart, 2014; Osmanaga, 2014; & Tiechnor, et al., 2012). Finally, questions 19 through 22 allowed for the students to share their hopes and plans for the future and how the single-gender experiences had affected those plans (Joo, 2010; Kohlass, et al.; 2010; & Lee and Bierman, 2015).

Interview Questions for Parents (see Appendix L):

1. How would you describe your daughter? Your family? Your neighborhood?
The elementary school?
2. What were your education goals for your daughter prior to her entering kindergarten? What are they now? If they've changed, why?
3. How would you describe any college discussions you have had with your daughter both prior to single-gender experiences starting in kindergarten and now? Has she changed her views on college since kindergarten?
4. What are your overall general goals for your daughter in the coming years in regards to the areas of education, personal (family, marriage, etc), and future success, and a career? Are they different now than they were prior to single-gender classes? Why or why not?
5. Has single-gender classrooms affected these goals either positively or negatively?
If so, how?
6. How would you describe the single-gender classrooms that your daughter has been a part of from kindergarten to second grade? Describe the single-gender classrooms from third grade to fifth grade.
7. Do you have any other daughters that have not been in a single-gender classroom?
If so, describe the differences.
8. How would you describe benefits that you believe your daughter has experienced due to the single-gender classroom from kindergarten to second grade?
Education? Self-esteem? Why?

9. Since being in the single-gender classroom from kindergarten, describe how your daughter's attitude/feelings/beliefs have stayed the same or changed towards school in general? Towards herself (i.e. self-esteem, voice, strength in who she is)?
10. Why do you believe these attitudes/feelings/beliefs have stayed constant or changed?

The parent interviews were planned to give additional information from the parental point-of-view on how single-gender classrooms had affected the perceptions of education and of self in their daughters. This data not only gave further descriptions from their point-of-view but also helped to collaborate the descriptions of their daughters' experiences. Just as with the student interview questions, these questions added to the case study by giving the opportunity to add rich details and descriptions about single-gender and the way it had affected the students in the classrooms. Question one gave the parents the opportunity to describe and share the background knowledge of the family and neighborhood that the students may not necessarily know about or understand because of age and maturity (Erarslan & Rankin, 2013; Yelgun & Karaman, 2015). In questions two through four, the parents described their family values and attitudes and what they hoped for their daughters since Erarslan and Rankin (2013) shared that families pass their attitudes and values down to their children. These descriptions helped to give background knowledge to where the students were prior to and after single-gender experiences in respect to family values passed down about education and their futures (Lee & Breman, 2015). Finally, questions six through ten gave the parents the opportunity to describe their daughter's experience with single-gender education and explain how it had affected their perceptions of education or self (Hart, 2014; Huang, 2013; Osmanaga, 2014; Spearman & Watt, 2013). These

questions gave the opportunity for the parents to share how single-gender either positively or negatively had impacted, in their eyes, their daughter's future (Jones & Presler-Marshall, 2012).

Interview Questions for Teachers and Principal (see Appendix M):

1. How long have you taught single-gender classes to young ladies? Which grades?
Coeducational classes?
2. Why did you choose to teach a single-gender class of girls or were you told you would be teaching this class?
3. What training did you receive in regards to teaching in a single-gender classroom and how does this impact how you teach single-gender classes?
4. How would you describe your single-gender early elementary classroom and the girls who participated in it.
5. What do you see as the benefits for this type of classroom on the girls in their early elementary years? Elementary years? High school years? In the future? Why do you see these as benefits?
6. What do you see as the drawbacks of this type of classroom on the girls in their early elementary years? Elementary years? High school years? In the future? Why do you see these as drawbacks?
7. Being in a 100% Title I School, how have you seen the program impact the perceptions of education and self, either positively or negatively, in the girls today?
In a few years?

The purpose of these interview questions was to gain a deeper understanding of those teaching the single-gender classrooms and how they described the experiences of the girls they had taught in them. Questions one through three were background knowledge of the teachers,

how they came to teach single-gender classes, and the training they received (Chadwell, 2007 & Sax, 2007). Questions four through seven allowed the teachers to express their experiences, thoughts, and beliefs on the single-gender program and the girls that had gone through their classrooms (Belfi et al., 2012 & Malik and Mirza, 2014).

Surveys

A demographic survey was given to only the parent participants (see Appendix K). This survey was used to gain further insight into the demographical backgrounds of the students and their family and community perceptions. Demographic information was gathered from the students and parents. Since all students in the school were on free and reduced lunch, that data from the school confirmed the poverty level of the student participants. School and community data, such as poverty levels, transitional levels, types of households (single parent versus two parent homes), ethnic backgrounds, and any other pertinent information to describe the neighborhood where the girls lived and went to school, was also collected. However, to gather specific data on the families in the study, I needed a survey to gather basic family background/demographic information. I was unable to locate a survey that fit the needs of this particular study. Therefore, I created a survey to collect the information I needed. The reason for the survey was to get a better picture, understanding, and description of the low-socioeconomic neighborhood and households where the participants lived. It addressed the central research question of perceptions of girls from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods.

Focus Groups

There were two focus groups: one for the students and one for the teachers. The questions stemmed from themes and questions that emerged from the individual interviews as well as a set of initial questions. Focus groups provided an opportunity for the participants to openly discuss

their shared experiences in the case based on open-ended questions (Yin, 2012). Throughout these discussions, I listened instead of interjecting into the discussion so that the student's experiences that were shared did not involve any of my preconceived notions. These discussions lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and were held at the school in the conference room. The focus groups were also recorded, transcribed, and verified by participants. These transcriptions were also put into the Atlas TI program for further coding and analysis. I used the following semi-structured questions (see Appendices N & O) as a guide for the focus groups to keep the conversation fluid.

Focus Group Questions for Students (Appendix N)

1. How would you describe what it is like to be in a single-gender girl's class since kindergarten?
2. How was it different in your kindergarten through second-grade classes being with girls rather than being in a class with boys? What about third through fifth grades?
3. Which class would you prefer to be in, single-gender girls or co-ed with boys? Why?
4. How did single-gender classrooms in kindergarten through second grade help you with your grades? What about third through fifth grade?
5. How did single-gender classrooms in kindergarten through second grade help your self-esteem? Self-esteem means to have pride in yourself. What about third through fifth grade?
6. What were your future plans in kindergarten through second grade? College? Career? Family? Are they the same now? If not, why did they change?

7. Do you plan to live in Hopkins or move to another city/state when you are an adult? Why? Have you always wanted to live there? Why or why not?

Further questions were created and/or these questions were edited based on interview responses. The first three questions allowed for the students to describe and discuss their shared experience of being in a single-gender classroom (Huang, 2013; Spearman & Watt, 2013). By sharing their personal experiences, the other participants were able to agree or disagree and thus share their perspectives on how (either positively or negatively) the experiences had affected their perceptions of education and self (Glasser, 2012; Hart, 2014; Tambo, et al., 2011).

Focus Group Questions for Teachers (Appendix O)

1. How would you describe the success of a single-gender classroom for girls at Hopkins Elementary School starting in the early elementary years (kindergarten through second grade)? Elementary years (third through fifth grade)? Education? Self-perceptions?
2. Can you describe the differences in the academics and/or self-perceptions of those girls that have been in single-gender since kindergarten versus those that have only been in for a year or two? (Note that only the girls in single-gender classroom since kindergarten are participants in this study. This question is limited so as to gain a deeper understanding of how single-gender impacts the girls across time).
3. How do you think the single-gender environment affects girls in a Title I school versus a non-Title I school? Why?

Further questions were created and/or these questions were edited based on the interview responses. The first two questions above gave the teacher participants the opportunity to

describe and share their experience, either individually or as a faculty as a whole, with the single-gender program at Hopkins Elementary School. (Cremin & Nakabugo, 2012; Glasser, 2012; Spearman & Watt, 2013; Schneewies & Zweimuller, 2012). Since Hopkins Elementary School was in a low-socioeconomic neighborhood, question three gives the participants the opportunity to share how their single-gender program was effective (or not) in a Title I school (Calzada, et al., 2015; Goodkind, 2013; Jones & Presler-Marshall, 2012; Navarre, 2014; Yelgun & Karaman, 2015).

Data Analysis

In this single instrumental case study, data analysis came from focusing on the variety of data collected. The data were analyzed in a variety of ways so that the data would reveal the understandings, descriptions, and explanations that the participants shared. By triangulating the data, information was further strengthened by seeing the data reveal the same themes and analysis across all participants and data sources (Yin, 2009).

First, I bracketed myself out of the study and the analysis section. By bracketing myself out, I ensured that I set aside all preconceptions or personal opinions (Stake, 1978). Second, all interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim by myself and given back to the participants to check before analysis. The transcripts were entered into Atlas TI (a qualitative data analysis software program that I purchased) where I coded the data. Next, a description of the case was written, and a narrative for each participant and her parents was also transcribed.

A categorical aggregation of the coding took place (Yin, 2009). Then the direct interpretation of the patterns and themes from the records, data, and survey was noted and analyzed. Patterns and themes were instruments I went through. I coded and labeled each piece of information systematically so that the themes and major ideas came together (Rubin & Rubin

2011). The codes and thus themes that emerged from each participant, their parents, and their teachers were cross-case synthesized. Yin (2009), stated that this cross-case synthesis relied heavily on “argumentative interpretation”; therefore, it was important “to know how to develop strong, plausible, and fair arguments that are supported by the data” (p. 160).

Trustworthiness

Within this study, to ensure that the study was trustworthy, certain checks were put in place to increase the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study. Below are the methods that were used in this study to ensure the trustworthiness created with each of my participants.

Credibility

In this case study, I was the human instrument and was therefore responsible for ensuring that the study was valid. To maintain the validity of the study, considerations such as data triangulation, member checks, and peer reviews were used. The participants (students, parents, principal, and teachers) were encouraged to review the transcriptions of their responses in interviews and focus groups. The reason for these member checks was to ensure that the participants could be sure that their message and responses were accurate and portray their intended message. By having the parents also read their daughter’s transcripts, the parents could clarify any information that was vague when presented by the student. This will be done due to the age and maturity of the student participant.

Using at least three methods of data collection allowed triangulation of the data to occur (Stake, 1995). This triangulation ensured that the themes and data that emerged were not standing on their own but were stronger because of the data showing the same results by using different data collection methods.

The research was peer-reviewed by a colleague with credentials and qualifications such as being in education and having completed prior research specifically in a case study. It was important that the peer reviewing the study didoes not have a vested interest in single-gender. This was important as I am a single-gender teacher and parent, and thus am vested in the single-gender classroom. By having the study peer reviewed, a standard of quality was upheld and also provided credibility for the study.

It was important that I, as both the researcher and also having a relationship to the study itself, had to be reflective throughout the entire process. By being reflective on the relationship to the study and my assumptions and beliefs towards research in general and more specifically the study, I began to make connections. These connections explained the choices, decisions, observation notes, questions, and even word choice used in the study. When I reflected by using short quotes and words, I was memoing so that later in the process my memory could be jogged without interfering with current data gathering or analysis.

Dependability and Confirmability

The audit trail was when I kept meticulous descriptions of the steps of the study starting with the first step of development through the data collection, analysis and the day of the final dissertation. By keeping this trail, if there were any questions that arose regarding steps or rationale in decision-making during the process, there was a report of what happened, when and why it happened in the method used. Memoing throughout the study was a way to maintain dependability in the study. Within qualitative studies, I was the human instrument through which the data were collected and analyzed. It was necessary to memo my personal thoughts and biases out of the research. Stake (1995) discussed the importance of realizing that biases are

natural and would happen but the importance of keeping them in check through strategies such as memoing was important.

To maintain confirmability, which means that the participants' voices were heard and accurate, I set aside all biases and perspectives on the case (Yin, 2009). I ensured that I kept an accurate audit trail and bracketed myself out so that the themes that emerged from the data presented were truly the descriptions of the participants themselves (Stake, 1995).

Transferability

Thick, rich data were a necessity for a qualitative case study for transferability to be present (Creswell, 2013 and Stake, 1995). The more description given, the easier it was for other researchers to replicate this study and thus compare results. For transferability, the study included the maximum variation for the study to be replicated and/or transferred. In this study, the student participants were girls in the fourth and fifth-grade single-gender classroom that had been in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten. The participants included a heterogeneous mixture of ethnicities and academic levels.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the process of this study, all ethical considerations were regarded. The IRB was used to ensure that the study was appropriate for the participants, and each participant had submitted an informed consent document. Pseudonyms were used for all people and schools. Seeing that I did not have any influence over the participants, there was no direct conflict of interest. I, however, am a vested teacher in the single-gender classroom and community, and for this reason, worked diligently to employ methods to ensure that I did not allow any biases into the research. I kept all data received confidential and kept all documents locked in a file cabinet in my home. I ensured that the sensitivity of all information was also kept private. I followed

proper protocols, allowed my participants to read and adjust all transcribed interviews and then allowed for debriefing with the participants.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe how single-gender, early elementary classrooms impact the perceptions of education and self of the girls from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. This case study was chosen so that the participants could describe and share their experiences that researchers and educators could gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of single-gender classrooms. The case study allowed for the collection of data in a variety of formats to achieve data triangulation (Yin, 2009).

The data collected included information from participants, including students from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods that had been in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten, the parents of the participating girls, teachers of single-gender early elementary classrooms, and the principal of the school. Data were collected using one-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys, document analysis from the school and county, as well as student writings and comic strips, as a way to share their perceptions in their own words. The data were analyzed via categorical aggregation by locating patterns and themes which was coded and put into the Atlas ti system. A narrative for each participant and her parents was written as well.

This case study provided the evidence of how single-gender classrooms at the early elementary level impact perceptions of girls from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. Using a case study gave the participants the opportunity to have their voices heard through their first-hand experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this single case study was to describe the experiences of fourth and fifth-grade girls in their kindergarten through second-grade single-gender classrooms and the impact of these classes upon their perceptions of education and self. Through the case study, participants — including the girls, their parents, their teachers, and the principal — described their stories and experiences through perceptions in their own words, interviews, focus groups, and surveys, in addition to background document analysis. I used all of these, allowing for data triangulation (Yin, 2009). The findings from the data collected allowed for themes to emerge which produced explicit answers to the research questions.

This study was guided by the central research question: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact the perceptions of girls from a low-socioeconomic neighborhood in South Carolina toward education and themselves? The sub-questions were as follows:

RQ1: What experiences did fourth and fifth-grade girls have in their single-gender early elementary classrooms?

RQ2: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls' perceptions of themselves?

RQ3: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls' perceptions of education?

RQ4: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls' future plans?

The data were collected over the course of three weeks from participants, including seven students, seven parents, six teachers, and one principal. The data in this study were presented in

a way that allowed the participants' voices to describe their experiences and stories in thick, rich detail. Creswell (2013) noted, "thick description means that [I] provide[d] details when describing [the] case" (p. 252). He continued to describe thick and rich data by "interconnecting the details, using strong action verbs, and quotes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). By providing thick, rich data, readers have the opportunity to transfer the detailed descriptions of the stories from this study to other settings that may have similar characteristics (Creswell, 2013). Chapter four will conclude with a summary of the findings.

Participants

There were three types of participants in this study: students (girls in fourth or fifth grade that had been in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten), their parent(s), and the single-gender girls' teachers and principal. The final group of participants included seven students, seven parents, six teachers, and one principal. All student participants completed their two individual interviews and their written prompts; however, two students were absent from the focus group. Due to the high transitory nature of the school, only 14 student participants met the criteria for the study when recruitment began. During recruitment, two of the possible 14 student participants moved to other schools and two parents declined the invitation. The other three students/parents never responded to the invitation, despite letters and phone calls from both the researcher and the teachers. However, data saturation was met with the seven student participants, and the parental and teacher data echoed the voices of the student participants. The principal and teachers all participated in their individual interviews; however, one teacher was unable to meet the focus group. All parents completed the demographic survey; however, one parent decided not to participate in the interview but did allow her survey to be included and her

daughter to participate. Tables 1, 2, and 3 present the demographic information for each set of participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Student Participants

Student Participants	Grade	Ethnicity	Academic Level	Years in Single Gender
Chanelle	4th	African American	High	5
Kassie	4th	African American	Average	5
LaKeisha	5th	African American	Low	6
Lola	5 th	Hispanic	Average	6
Sarah	5 th	Caucasian	High	6
Sasha	4 th	African American	High	5
Shay	4th	African American	Low/Average	5

Table 2

Demographics of Parent Participants

Parent Participant	Age Range	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Children in Home	Level of Education	Employment	Years Lived in Hopkin's
Chanelle's Mother	25-34	African American	Married	3	trade/technical/vocational training	Employed	16-20
Kassie's Mother	35-44	African American	Divorced	1	High school graduate/GED	Employed	11-15
LaKeisha's Mother	35-44	African American	Single	7	Some high school/no diploma	Homemaker	6-10
Lola's Mother	25-34	Hispanic	Married	3	Some college credit/no degree	Homemaker	21+
Sarah's Mother	35-44	Caucasian	Married	4	Some high school/no diploma	Homemaker	21+
Sasha's Mother	25-34	African American	Single	6	Some college credit/no degree	Employed	21+

Table 3

Demographics of Teacher/Principal Participants

Teacher/Principal Participants	Years Teaching Single Gender	Single Gender Grade Taught Currently	Years Teaching Co-educational
Ms. B. Batson	2	Kindergarten	4
Ms. F. Fletcher	8	Second	16
Mr. G. Grayhawk	9	Principal	30
Ms. H. Hadley	3	Fourth	0
Ms. M. McKinney	4	Fifth	13
Ms. M. Miller	2	First	5
Ms. R. Rogers	8	Third	3

Chanelle and Chanelle's Mother

Chanelle is a fourth-grade, African-American girl who lives at home with her parents, third-grade sister, and two-year-old brother. She is performing high academically and has no behavior concerns. She described herself as a “loyal girl with a great self-esteem and a great personality” and “a happy girl with a great smile when she gets awards” (Chanelle, personal communication, October 6, 2016). Her parents have lived in their local community for 16-20 years. Chanelle's mother (personal communication, October 6, 2016) shared that they are a “tight-knit” family that “pride ourselves in loving each other and kind of sticking together and working hard at what we do.” She stated that they live in a small neighborhood behind the hospital and “everybody has kind of been there for years and we all stick together” (Chanelle's mother, personal communication, October 6, 2016). Chanelle's mother has vocational training and works in the local community.

Kassie and Kassie's Mother

Kassie is a fourth-grade, African-American girl who lives with her mother and visits her dad every other weekend. She has two stepbrothers at her dad's house. She is performing at an average academical level and has no behavior concerns. She describes herself as “fun, loving, funny, love to be caring, [and] generous” (Kassie, personal communication, October 17, 2016). Kassie shared that their neighborhood has “loud dogs in the middle of the night” and she goes to play with friends in the neighborhood (Kassie, personal communication, October 17, 2016). Kassie's mother has lived in the neighborhood for 11-15 years, has a high school diploma and works in the local community.

LaKeisha and LaKeisha's Mother

LaKeisha is a fifth-grade, African-American girl who lives with her mother and her six sisters that range in age from four to 21. She is performing low academically and receives special education services. Her sisters attend three different elementary schools all for different academic needs and her 21-year-old sister just received her GED in the last couple of months. She has no behavior concerns. LaKeisha (personal communication, October 13, 2016) described herself as “I’m nice, I’m friendly, I’m honest, I’m smart, I’m cheerful, polite.” Her mother described her as “fun to be around,” “like a big baby,” and as someone who “loves to create to put things together” (LaKeisha’s mother, personal communication, October 10, 2016). They live on a corner lot behind a church less than a mile from the school. LaKeisha’s mother (personal communication, October 10, 2016) shared, “it’s a whole lot better than when I first moved here...there hasn’t been no gun violence or anything like that [now].” They have been renting to own their house for the last 6-10 years. LaKeisha’s mother has no high school diploma and works as a stay-at-home mother. LaKeisha’s father has been in and out of jail all her life.

Lola and Lola's Mother

Lola is a fifth-grade, Hispanic girl who lives at home with her parents, second-grade sister, six-month-old brother, and grandfather. She began kindergarten with very limited English. Lola is performing at an average academical level and has no behavior concerns. She described herself as “a little shy not that much [and] I happy, nice, [and] respect others” (Lola, personal communication, October 13, 2016). Lola’s mother (personal communication, October 6, 2016) described her as a child who is “a happy girl, she’s a little shy at times, outspoken when she wants to be and at times very quiet... really laid back, and she gives a lot of love, very caring.” When asked about the neighborhood and school, Lola’s mother shared how “when I first

got to the US, obviously I came here too so it's kind of in a way I feel happy that she's, that I was here and now she is here" (Lola's mother, personal communication, October 6, 2016).

Sarah and Sarah's Mother

Sarah is a fifth-grade, Caucasian girl who lives with her aunt and uncle that adopted her and her brother. She has two other siblings in the home as well. Sarah is performing high academically and has no behavior concerns. She described herself as a girl who has "glasses [and] blonde hair" and is funny and silly but "always concentrates on my work instead of other things" (Sarah, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Sarah's mother (personal communication, October 10, 2016) described her as "very outgoing once you get to know her... [and] all around helpful." When asked about the neighborhood they live in Sarah's mother shared how her blended family recently moved about five minutes away from the school from their home of 21 plus years. She shared they were happy with the move as "we really don't have to worry about much [now] ... we had to worry about people stealing" (Sarah's mother, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Sarah's mother did not finish high school and is a homemaker.

Sasha and Sasha's Mother

Sasha is a fourth-grade, African-American girl who lives with her mother and her five siblings. She has an older brother in seventh-grade, and her sisters are in third, second, first, and kindergarten. She is performing high academically and has no behavior concerns. She described herself as "I'm unique, I'm hard working, I never give up, I'm kind and friendly" (Sasha, personal communication, October 6, 2016). Sasha's mother (personal communication, October 4, 2016) described her as a "great child" and how she "couldn't ask for better child period." Sasha's mother has lived in the local community for more than 21 years and works in the local

community. She shared how her house is “not terrible, it’s decent, not the best but decent” and how the elementary school “starting out it did not have a good reputation but . . .I’ve learned it is not bad . . .I think the neighborhood and the students, some of the students give it a bad name” (Sasha’s mother, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

Shay and Shay’s Mother

Shay is a fourth-grade, African-American girl who lives with her mother and her eighth-grade sister that was also in single-gender from kindergarten through fifth-grade. She is performing low/low-average academically and has no behavior concerns. Shay (personal communication, October 7, 2016) described herself as “calming,” “caring,” “trustworthy,” and “awesome.” Her mother described her as “wonderful, awesome, [and] great” (Shay’s mother, personal communication, October 7, 2016). Shay’s mother has lived in the local community for over 21 years and described the neighborhood as a quiet one. She has her high school diploma and is currently back in school at her local community college in addition to working in the community.

Ms. Batson

Ms. Batson is a kindergarten, all-girls teacher at Hopkins Elementary. She has taught single-gender classes for two years and co-educational classes for four years. Ms. Batson shared how she looked forward to teaching single gender when she learned she would be teaching it. When asked to describe the girls in her classroom, she shared, “I have 27 ladies and they are wonderful. We have a group that 50% are ESOL, so that is a challenge in and of itself. We also have some students that have never been in school before” (B. Batson, personal communication, October 6, 2016).

Ms. Fletcher

Ms. Fletcher is a second-grade, all-girls teacher at Hopkins Elementary. She has taught single-gender classes for 8 years and co-educational classes for 18 years. When the opportunity presented itself for her to teach a single-gender class, she gave it a try. She said, “It’s probably one of the best decisions I’ve made” (F. Fletcher, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

Ms. Fletcher described her girls this year.

One of my most energetic classes I’ve had. They are very smart and very inquisitive.

I’ve had mostly Hispanic girls this year, so that’s the most I’ve ever had. There’s a lot of differences in my classroom this year. There are a lot of pullouts, but we seem to be a family and seemed to become that way really soon. I know a part of that is because most of them have been together last year and the year before. But we bonded really quick. (F. Fletcher, personal communication, October 5, 2016)

Mr. Grayhawk

Mr. Grayhawk is the principal at Hopkins Elementary. He has been in education for 30 years. He has been the principal of Hopkins Elementary for 13 years. Mr. Grayhawk described the school as “a very high poverty school. We live in a 100 percent poverty designated area by the US Department of Education (G. Grayhawk, personal communication, October 6, 2016).

The school is home to approximately 650 pre-K through fifth-grade students. The ethnicity of the students has changed over the last 13 years and is now approximately 42 percent Hispanic, 40 percent African-American, and the rest are Caucasian or mixed. Mr. Grayhawk brought in single-gender classrooms nine years ago as a trial with kindergarten through second grade in order to help meet the “needs of each of the students” and then upon seeing the success after just

one year, he expanded the program to include one class of girls and one class of boys at each grade level (G. Grayhawk, personal communication, October 6, 2016).

Ms. Hadley

Ms. Hadley is the teacher for the all-girls, fourth-grade class at Hopkins Elementary. She is in her third year teaching single gender, and she has never taught co-educational classes before. When she found out she would be teaching single-gender classes, her first thoughts were she “probably would not have even thought to offer [her]self for that type of position” because “it’s a different beast and when you are training ... all most schools have are co-ed classes, so that is what you are exposed to. And going into the unknown is a little bit scary” (H. Hadley, personal communication, October 6, 2016). Ms. Hadley (personal communication, October 6, 2016) described her group of fourth-graders as “16 girls, one Caucasian, four Hispanic, and the rest African-American...their skills range from right on level with reading to second-grade level with reading along with on level for math and second-grade level for math skills.”

Ms. McKinney

Ms. McKinney teaches the all-girls, fifth-grade class at Hopkins Elementary. She is in her fourth year teaching single gender girls, and she taught co-educational classes for 13 years prior. She has taught at both Title I and non-Title I schools in the county. Ms. McKinney asked to teach the class of girls. She stated, “I truly do feel like it makes a difference in the way I teach and the way the girls learn” (M. McKinney, personal communication, October 4, 2016). She described her class of 18 girls.

They vary in like their abilities from all the way up to gifted and talented to those with special needs. I have ESOL kids in my classroom. They are very outgoing and funny,

and some of them are drama queens. (M. McKinney, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

Ms. Miller

Ms. Miller is in her second year teaching the all-girls first-grade class. She has taught for 5 years in the co-educational setting all in various Title I schools. When the opportunity to teach a single-gender classroom arose, she asked for the chance as her previous year was a “really terrible year and I felt like I needed something to make me feel like I still loved teaching” (M. Miller, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She was asked to describe her classroom of 15 girls.

Three are Caucasian, 6 are African-American and 6 no 5 are Hispanic, and one is mixed. They get along really well...I don't have any problems with fighting or drama of competitiveness for anything. They all work together well, but they all want to be the mama duck and help everybody do everything and kind of all be in charge all at once which is kind of hard for 15 of them. But they all still do a really good job with it and work well together. In reading and writing, they do fairly well. In the science and math areas, they are typically a little bit lower. (M. Miller, personal communication, October 12, 2016)

Ms. Rogers

Ms. Rogers is currently teaching all-girls third grade but has also taught the all-girls, fourth-grade class, as well. She has taught single-gender for a total of 9 years and has taught co-educational classes for 3 years. She expressed her excitement to teach single gender.

After we did the studies here about what type of learner we were, I am very much a girl learner. And so it excited me that I could then pass that on to my students since I'm

geared toward that. I felt like I was well suited for it. (R. Rogers, personal communication, October 4, 2016)

When she described her students, she noted how “the ones that have been in the program are excited to continue, especially even up to fourth grade. The ones that are coming into it are excited to try something new” (R. Rogers, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She also commented how she likes that “a lot of them have been together, so they already know how they operate.... [and] are already familiar with one another, and they know how they work, and it’s very cohesive” (R. Rogers, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

Results

The results of this case study were identified through document analysis, perceptions in their own words with written prompts by students, interviews, focus groups, and demographic surveys from the parent participants. While the participants varied by type (students, parents, teachers, and principal), backgrounds, and experiences outside of the single-gender classroom, many of the participants shared similar experiences and responses to the single-gender classroom. In the data collection process, thematic saturation occurred as these responses and experiences became repetitious, and no further insight was being gleaned (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I transcribed each interview and focus group verbatim. I then input these transcripts along with the student written prompts into the Atlas.ti software system. The Atlas.ti software system was utilized to generate initial codes (see Appendix R). This system allowed for all transcripts and written prompts to be uploaded which allowed for codes to be easily identified and extracted. After creating initial codes, I went back through the codes and removed any codes and statements that were not specifically related to the single-gender classroom experiences. I hand coded the data to verify the initial codes and themes . The remaining codes were then

analyzed and grouped into themes that related to each of the four research questions. The codes and organization of these codes into themes are in Table 4.

After collecting, transcribing, analyzing, and coding the data, all participants received their individual transcripts and focus group transcripts along with a list of the themes generated via email. All participants responded in agreement that the transcripts and themes were an accurate assessment of their responses and experiences. The analysis of data along with the quotations from each of the participants provided the evidence needed to answer each of the research questions in this study.

Table 4

Enumerations of Open Codes and Themes

Open Code	Enumeration of Open Code Apperance Across Data Sets	Theme
Family	31	Community
Friendship	32	
Boys	29	
Confidence	34	Personal Identity
Self-esteem	20	
In Their Own Words	12	
Work Ethic	18	Academic Perserverance
Willingness to Try	16	
Stregnth and Weaknesses	30	
Middle and High School	12	Bright Future
College	25	
Career	18	
Where to Live	16	

Note: Open codes were analyzed using the Atlas.ti software program to identify themes.

Research Question One

Participant responses to student individual interviews questions 2 through 18, parent individual interview questions 6 through 10, teacher individual questions 4 through 7, student

focus group questions 1 through 3, teacher focus group questions 1 through 2, and the student written prompts provided data and detailed descriptions to support the first research question: “What experiences did fourth and fifth-grade girls have in their single-gender early elementary classrooms?” The data analysis revealed three codes centered on the experiences of the students in their early elementary classrooms. All participants agreed unanimously that single-gender early elementary classroom experiences were beneficial for the students from the experiences they had in the classrooms to the student perceptions of education and themselves, and on their futures. The codes or main ideas that emerged in the data from all participants in relation to this research question included family, friendship, and boys. The overarching idea or theme that tied together these three separate codes was community. Within the community of a single gender classroom the girls had family and friendship with the absence of boys.

Family. The word “family” was spoken numerous times in the data collected from the written acrostics and comic strips from the students to the interviews and focus groups by the students, parents, and teachers (see Appendix S). Lola’s first entry on her acrostic poem described single-gender classrooms as a “sisterhood” (Lola, written acrostic poem, October 6, 2016). Shay (personal communication, October 6, 2016) expressed how she “can share my feelings like in a family.”

Lola’s mother expressed (see Appendix T)

I think since she is in a single-gender class, she has been more outgoing, more herself because she is in the same group. Like they grow up as little sisters, so she’s more outgoing and more confident in herself. She’s more caring and compassionate due to that too. I am very thankful for that. I think it has affected her positively because she has

been with the same girls since kindergarten and they have kind of been growing up together. They are bonded. (Personal communication, October 6, 2016).

The teachers offered multiple examples of how the classrooms were not simply a community of learners but a family of learners. Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 12, 2016) discussed how “we seem to be a family and seemed to become that way really soon. I know a part of that is because most of them have been together last year and the year before. But we bonded really quick. [And] that we still grow together as a family and learn from one another.” Ms. Batson (personal communication, October 6, 2016) noted the “positive support system” in their classroom. Ms. McKinney agreed with Ms. Batson and Ms. Fletcher’s descriptions. She detailed how being in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten “affected that core group that has always been together” as she shared “they are closer” and “it is a much more close-knit group of girls. They’re very supportive and encouraging of one another because they have been together for so long” (M. McKinney, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Ms. Rogers added to the discussion:

a lot of them have been together, so they already know how they operate, so you don’t really have that getting to know you period because the majority of them are already familiar with one another and they know how they work, and it’s very cohesive. (R. Rogers, personal communication, October 12, 2016)

The principal, Mr. Grayhawk, described differences in single-gender classrooms and co-educational classrooms. He noted two major differences were seen in “regards to referrals [where] we find that they become more of a family and they look out for each other” and “bullying incidents are almost at a zero percent in each of the single-gender classes just because of that family” (G. Grayhawk, personal communication, October 6, 2016). Ms. Miller shared an

example of how her group of girls became a family that helped one student in particular. She described a girl

who was incredibly shy in kindergarten and didn't really speak at all, and the first semester I had her was really quiet. When we came back in January, pretty much wouldn't stop talking. And there were talks of like retaining her; not sure if she should stay back again but I really felt like she needed to stay with that core group of girls because she was coming out socially so much that I didn't want to take her away from what she had grown accustomed to because she is so incredibly shy that staying with that core group of girls helped her come out of her shell more, which in turn helped her become more successful, at least in first grade academically. (M. Miller, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

It is this comradery, Ms. Miller believed, that provides a "sense of comfort...because they might not have so much consistency at home. And if they have that consistency kindergarten through fifth grade that's their family...that is how they see each other" and "that sense of this is my family. They will call each other their cousins even though I know they are not their cousins. But like they are still a family" (M. Miller, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

Friendship. The students especially focused on the friendships created in this special environment. While the parents and the teachers commented on it as well, they focused on the environment more like a family than friendships. In the comic strips the students created, the pictures and words showed girls saying, "I think I'll ask her to be my BFF" and "do you want to play" (Chanelle & Lola, personal comic strips, October 6, 2016). Chanelle explained how even in kindergarten through second grade how

every girl knew how to talk to me and if I needed some advice from someone, I could have just said something...because if a girls is going through something rough then she can ask me maybe for some advice. If I can help them, then I would, and if I can't, then I would try the best I can. (Chanelle, personal communication, October 10, 2016)

LaKeisha, Lola, and Sarah wrote in their acrostic poems how the girls “respect each other,” “everybody gets along,” “great friends” and “encourage others” and the class “lets us make new friends” (LaKeisha, Lola & Sarah, written acrostic poems, October 2016). Lola (personal communication, October 13, 2016) shared how one of her favorite parts of single-gender classrooms was “making friends.”

Sasha (personal communication, October 12, 2016) preferred to be in a class with all girls because “I get to be with girls instead of just girls and boys because you can be silly with girls and not boys” also “I have some friends that I can talk to.” One girl shared how single-gender classes “made [her] feel happy” because “[she] can have a whole bunch of friends” and “[she] can share [her] emotions” (Shay, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Chanelle (personal communication, October 12, 2016) explained in a single-gender classroom is “like being in a room where you can share your secrets and your self-opinions.” Another student noted in the classroom “you get to be with your best friends all of the time” (Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

Chanelle's mother (personal communication, October 8, 2016) noted how “being around the same people in every classroom it kind of builds your self-esteem” because “she is able to feel comfortable with speaking out versus going to a new classroom every year with boys and girls and you just don't know anybody and get scared.” Another mother shared how her

daughter has “had most of the same friends throughout the entire experience” (Sasha’s mother, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 5, 2016) expressed how her girls “want to come to school” and “their motivation is a little bit stronger” and it is because “it is almost like a sorority or a club.” She also explained how when new students join the class or “sisterhood” that “they celebrate them like we get a new student and they clap when they come to the door like you get to be a part of this” (F. Fletcher, personal communication, October 5, 2016). Mr. Grayhawk (personal communication, October 6, 2016) explained, “What I have seen over the years is that it has built some comradery amongst the girls.”

Boys. While the interviews and focus groups revolved around the single-gender all-girls’ classrooms, the experiences, examples, benefits, and even possible future drawbacks discussed had boys as a common thread. The students, such as Chanelle, wanted to stay in single-gender classrooms into middle school “because you don’t have to deal with none of the bully drama because boys might be bullies and stuff” (Chanelle, personal communication, October 6, 2016). Kassie (personal communication, October 17, 2016) did not want to be with boys because it was “harder with boys” and “they tease sometimes” because “they might be laughing and kind of makes you feel like you can’t do it.” She explained the girls “would cheer for you” (Kassie, personal communication, October 17, 2016).

During the student focus group, the girls discussed how it was different being with just girls versus being with boys. One student thought “some boys are mean and stuff so you don’t have to like worry about them butting in and stuff” (Chanelle, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Shay (personal communication, October 12, 2016) agreed, “You don’t have to worry about them being mean to you or messing with you while you are working.” One girl said

without boys “you can be yourself and you can share your opinions” (Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Sasha (personal communication, October 12, 2016) added “you get to do silly things that boys will think is weird.”

The students then discussed their preference for single-gender or co-educational classrooms. Lola (personal communication, October 12, 2016) noted she preferred “all-girls because when you are doing your work boys keep making noises and you are trying to concentrate.” Another student explained, “I would feel uncomfortable, and I wouldn’t like to be myself with boys” (Chanelle, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Sasha (personal communication October 12, 2016) described how single-gender classrooms “helped me to focus more and you can concentrate, and you can focus and concentrate more than with boys.” Sarah (personal communication, October 12, 2016) agreed that “you can concentrate better because the boys aren’t there bugging you and they are talking and being bad.”

Sasha’s mother compared her two daughters’ experiences, one in single-gender classrooms and one in co-educational classrooms. She explained “you can tell the difference” especially

when they were in with boys...boys are great but I think sometimes...it does help just to be in a class where you can identify with just girls and at that age they think boys are just icky, so it does help a lot to be in the class with the same. They feel more comfortable like I said in the class with all girls. They don’t feel like you know anybody’s really picking on them like the guys are kind of so childish . . . And [girls] just feel more comfortable being amongst just girls and I think they do learn better as far as that.

(Sasha’s mother, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

Shay's mother (personal communication, October 7, 2016) agreed with Sasha's mother in that girls "understand stuff better than being in a class with boys . . . [that] play and horse around and see girls they altogether so they can talk and experience stuff."

Teachers also weighed in on the impact of not having boys in the classroom. Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 5, 2016) shared how "everybody kind of puts something in there and they don't have to worry about if boys are going to laugh at me." A fellow teacher explained that girls "don't have to worry about a boy thinking they are not smart or asking a dumb question. They are just able to ask, and they don't even preface it with this might be a dumb question" (H. Hadley, personal communication, October 8, 2016).

The principal, Mr. Grayhawk, (personal communication, October 6, 2016) revealed how girls "tend to flourish because they don't have any, for lack of a better word, competition from the boys who tend to be a little bit more persistent in discussions." He continued to share how especially at the upper levels the competition with trying to impress the opposite sex has been decreased because many times . . . the boys will do things to try to impress the girls and the girls will do things to impress the boys or not do things because they want to portray a particular image that is supposedly more female than they would in a non-single gender setting. (G. Grayhawk, personal communication, October 6, 2016).

He gave an example of friendship and comradery amongst the girls in the fifth-grade single-gender classroom.

They had teddy bears, and they wanted to hold on to the teddy bears all throughout the day. They kept them at their seats and had them with them. But then when we offered the teddy bears to any of the girls in the co-ed classes they did not want them because the boys would have seen them with the teddy bears and there would have been some making

fun, and they would not have been perceived well. But they felt safe in that room with everybody else. (G. Grayhawk, personal communication, October 6, 2016)

Ms. McKinney noted that one of the two largest benefits of her fifth-grade girls being in a single-gender classroom is

number one, less distractions because you don't have the boys in fifth-grade in the classroom with them that can sometimes cause a problem. Number two, the girls are less inhibited, and they are quicker to answer in math and to participate in science because they don't feel like they are being overwhelmed by the boys or where the boys tell them this is the way it is going to be...when it is boys in the classroom, they won't participate quite as well. (M. McKinney, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

Research Question Two

Data and detailed descriptions of participant responses to student individual interviews questions 12 through 18, parent individual interview questions 6 through 10, teacher individual questions 4 through 7, student focus group question 5, teacher focus group questions 1 and 2, and the student written prompts provided support for the second research question of "How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth grade girls' perceptions of themselves?" The data analysis revealed three codes centered on the impact single-gender early elementary classrooms had on the girls' perceptions of self. The codes or main ideas that emerged in relation to this research question were in their own words, confidence, and self-esteem. The overarching idea or theme that tied together these three separate codes was personal identity. The girls grew in their personal identities of self as evidenced through their own words and the increase in their confidence and self-esteem.

Confidence. The students, parents, and teachers all agreed the confidence of the students in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten is evident. All participants shared examples and experiences to reiterate this confidence that exuded from the students. The students depicted their confidence in making friends through their comic strip written prompts. One student drew herself asking a friend, “So, I was thinking about asking you to be my best friend. Do you want too (sic)” (Chanelle, comic strip, October 6, 2016)? Sasha also drew and wrote about asking someone “hi, wanna be my friend” but also wrote the words “kind, loving, intelligent, [and] outgoing on a picture titled “a project” and labeled it with the words “describing me” (Sasha, comic strip, October 4, 2016).

The students not only shared their confidence through their writing but their experiences. Kassie (personal communication, October 17, 2016) explained how single-gender “makes me feel better [and] confident.” One girl felt students in single-gender classrooms were encouraged to “be yourself there [and] you can be self-confident” and mentioned how “it makes you have courage for yourself and believe in yourself” (Sasha, personal communication, October 6, 2016). Sarah (personal communication, October 13, 2016) felt more girls should be in single-gender classrooms so “more girls could feel more confident and have more courage, and other girls could help boost their confidence.”

Parents, such as LaKeisha’s mother, (personal communication, October 10, 2016) expressed how single-gender early elementary classrooms “hasn’t affected negatively at all [but] positively; it, um, it put her mind set on track on where it needs to be a whole lot” and how it helped her “communication...opening up to me because she was like drew up and she would not like hardly say anything...now she has more communication and more outspoken.” Lola’s mother (personal communication, October 6, 2016) shared how since “in a single-gender class

she has been more outgoing, more herself, because she is in the same group...so she's more outgoing and more confident in herself...more caring and compassionate due to that too" and how "she has become more self-confident...When she started, she was very shy, very, very shy...she speaks her mind more, she asks questions more, but it has taken a long time; but I know it's due to the single gender."

Sarah's mother (personal communication, October 10, 2016) was no different as she gave an example of how "at first she was very shy when she first started school...She still has the moments, but now she is very outgoing...She has great self-confidence." Another mother agreed with Sarah's mother when she shared "[single-gender] it hasn't really affected her negatively. I think it's worked out great. I think it has helped her confidence a lot being in single-gender" (personal communication, October 4, 2016).

The examples of the confidence in the students were shared from the teachers and principal as well. Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 12, 2016) explained, Single gender provides girls at an early age an opportunity to build confidence. It doesn't have the competition like when I taught co-ed. I had to really push the girls to have a voice. Now, they do it on their own. They have more drive to me. They share more, and I just feel like this is important for them now so that when they experience co-educational classrooms, they are already conditioned to speak out and that they are smart. And you know that they have confidence.

Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 4, 2016) shared how single-gender classes in the kindergarten to second grade years "gives them a little more self-confidence to be able to handle what they are going to face" and "definitely gives them more experience with taking the initiative to do things and hopefully this carries over." Ms. Rogers (personal

communication, October 12, 2016) agreed with the other teachers in the building about the confidence in the students as “it really breaks a lot of them out of their shell” and she can see “a big difference, like seeing them walk down the hall like they are more outgoing...I think they have that self-confidence.”

At the teacher focus group, a large discussion revolved around the confidence level of the students. Ms. Batson, Ms. Fletch, and Ms. Miller shared how in the kindergarten, first, and second-grade classrooms students were confident. Ms. Batson (personal communication, October 12, 2016) noted her kindergarteners were “more independent.” One teacher shared, “I’ve noticed that in the first-grade classroom that they are more confident to tell their answers to things and talk about things” (M. Miller, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 12, 2016) stated, “I was really going to say the same thing, but I think that their confidence level is definitely a difference.” Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 12, 2016) noted how “by the time they get to fifth grade they are much more willing to answer, put their hands up, and come up to the board [because] that self-confidence is just there” and she shared “I just don’t think you see that in other classes.”

Ms. Hadley (personal communication, October 6, 2016) believed single-gender classrooms gave “them confidence” as it “helps them be risk takers and willing to try things out without knowing 100% the outcome” which in turn creates confidence toward “moving for that goal.” Ms. Batson (personal communication, October 12, 2016) noted that she believed this confidence “is going to help break the generational poverty that we see with this school.” The focus group discussion on confidence concluded with Ms. Miller sharing how self-confidence is important and how

when I was younger, and I was in class with boys I didn't want to speak, like, because being an outspoken girl was frowned upon. But in my classroom, you can be outspoken, and it be ok because nobody is judging you for it. But I think, it will hopefully teach them they can have their own voice and be confident with themselves with no matter what it is. (personal communication, October 12, 2016)

Self-esteem. As the students discussed their experiences in the single-gender early elementary classrooms, their self-esteem was revealed through their stories and their responses. Chanelle (personal communication, October 10, 2016) shared how “single gender made me love myself even more” and “[single-gender] like boosted [self-esteem] up, it increases.” Another student answered the question about what she loves most about herself is “that I'm myself, my own person,” and that other students should be in single-gender classrooms “because it gives you an opportunity to be yourself” and “you can share your opinions” (Sasha, personal communication, October 6, 2016). LaKeisha (personal communication, October 13, 2016) noted that “I like myself because I can learn more things.” Sarah (personal communication, October 13, 2016) noted in the focus group how single-gender classrooms make “you feel happy with you and you wouldn't have to change anything to be you.”

The parents were quick to note how many of their daughters had grown in their self-esteem while in the single-gender classrooms with the area of self-esteem being amongst the most frequent. Chanelle's mother (personal communication, October 6, 2016) stated, “Oh, her self-esteem has boosted, I would say 1000%, because she was just so quiet and I was so worried...I think it has boosted her self-esteem a lot.” Sarah's mother (personal communication, October 10, 2016) explained how “her self-esteem is great.” Shay's mother echoed these sentiments. She shared the notion of single gender as “it improves her self-esteem about herself

by being around girls her age and in a classroom with her teacher . . . So I think it has helped her and improved her and she very much likes it” and how “her self-esteem is good [and] it proves better since she’s been in single-gender class” (Shay’s mother, personal communication, October 7, 2016).

Teachers along with the principal at Hopkins Elementary highlighted that self-esteem in the students having been in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten. The teachers continually shared how one of the major benefits in the single-gender early elementary classrooms was the personal growth of the girls. The principal believed “they have found success, they’ve experience success, and because of that they are confident that they can do the things that they might not have” (G. Grayhawk, personal communication, October 6, 2016). Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 12, 2016) commented, “I think that because they have some of those same benefits to where they can kind of be free and be themselves their perception of self is stronger” and how “building that self, that confidence we’ve been talking about; that’s just going to help them be more well-rounded.” A fellow teacher responded that “self-esteem is a big one” when asked about benefits of single-gender early elementary classrooms because “they can be their truest selves and be comfortable” (R. Rogers, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

As the teachers discussed how the students would handle moving forward into middle and high school in co-educational classrooms, Ms. Hadley (personal communication, October 12, 2016) remarked how “Hopefully by then they’re independent, and their self-esteem and their want and their drive will help them.” Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 4, 2016) shared the importance “especially with the girls; it is real important for them to have perceptions of themselves that are more than otherwise that they would have especially with being in a Title I

school.” She described a field trip that she took her fifth graders on into the local community to an elegantly vintage upscale hotel for lunch. The field trip was two-fold, in that it taught “poise and those types of things that I could not do if I were teaching the boys too” and helped “the community to perceive them in a different type of way . . . They see them in a completely different light than what they might have heard from the Title I school” (M. McKinney, personal communication, October 4, 2016). She continued to explain how this “small part of the curriculum gives the girls’ self-confidence. It helps them to be able to handle themselves in an interview or speaking with someone one-on-one or learning how to make eye contact and those kinds of things” (M. McKinney, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

In their own words. Each of the participants shared their experiences in their own words throughout their interviews, focus groups, and the student participants’ written prompts. The written prompts gave the students the opportunity to describe how single-gender impacted their perceptions of self in their own words. The acrostic poems yielded words such as “determined, energetic, loving, nice, respectful, self-motivated, enthusiastic, devoted, encourage[ing], elegant, gentle, self-confident, eager, girly, neat, and being yourself” (Chanelle, Kassie, LaKeisha, Lola, Sarah, Sasha, & Shay, written acrostic poems, October 2016).

The students all used a variety of character traits to describe themselves. Sasha (personal communication, October 4, 2016) was quick and strong with her response to a description of herself as she stated, “I’m unique, I’m hard working, I never give up, [and] I’m kind and friendly” she shared how this is how she described herself once in fourth grade but while in kindergarten through second she was only “kind [and] nice.” LaKeisha (personal communication, October 13, 2016) expressed how she “impressed myself that I try my best” and then described herself as “I’m nice, I’m friendly, I’m honest, I’m smart um I’m cheerful, polite.”

Kassie (personal communication, October 17, 2016) continued describing herself in her own words as she noted how she was “fun, loving, funny...caring [and] generous” which she stated was different from “how I used to be bad all the time in [teacher’s name] classroom.” Lola (personal communication, October 6, 2016) described herself as “a little shy not that much. I happy, nice, respect others.” Another student started off by describing herself as “funny [and] silly” and expressed how single gender made her “feel good about myself” but then discussed how she changed from silly to saying “I don’t give up because if I did give up, I wouldn’t get anything done” (Sarah, personal communication, October 13, 2016). Shay (personal communication, October 7, 2016) used the words “calming,” “caring,” “trustworthy,” and “awesome” to describe herself and then shared she felt “proud of myself.”

Research Question Three

Data and detailed descriptions of participant responses to student individual interviews questions 2 through 11, parent individual interview questions 4 through 10, teacher individual questions 5 through 7, student focus group question 4, teacher focus group question 2 and 3, and the student written prompts provided responses for the third research question of “How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls’ perceptions of education?” The data analysis revealed three codes centered on the impact of single-gender early elementary classrooms had on girls’ perceptions of education. The codes or main ideas that emerged in relation to this research question included work ethic, willingness to try, and strengths versus weaknesses. The overarching idea or theme that tied together these three separate codes was that of academic perseverance. The girls’ academic perseverance grew as they improved their work ethic, willingness to try, and overcame or worked on their strengths and weaknesses within the classroom.

Work ethic. As the students shared their experiences in the single-gender early elementary classrooms, several students wrote on their acrostic poems “never give up,” “determined,” “devoted to hard work,” “give your best,” “never give up even if you do a mistake,” and “doing your best” (Chanelle, LaKeisha, Lola, & Sasha, written acrostic poems, October 2016). These phrases were later explained by the students as they shared during interviews and focus groups.

When LaKeisha (personal communication, October 13, 2016) shared how single gender was a good experience, her reasons included “you always work hard and try [y]our best.” One student noted how “single gender made me love myself even more. It has affected me by making me love myself even more and work harder and tried my best” (Chanelle, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Kassie (personal communication, October 17, 2016) agreed with Chanelle and shared how she “was studying more” because she “realized [she] didn’t want to stay back” although she is a straight A student. Another student believed that in single-gender classrooms “you can focus more and get your work done” (Shay, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Sarah (personal communication, October 13, 2016) mentioned that they could also “work better” in a single-gender classroom. Chanelle (personal communication, October 10, 2016) summed it up by saying single-gender classrooms “make me feel better, confident, [and give me] perseverance.”

The parents of the students agreed how the single-gender classrooms had impacted the work ethic of their daughters. Chanelle’s mother (personal communication, October 6, 2016) mentioned how she never “hardly do[es] anything at home...most of the work gets done at school. Lola’s mother (personal communication, October 6, 2016) discussed work ethic by giving an example of how Lola “gets mad at me if I pick her up early for some reason” and how

“she’s more enthusiastic about doing her work” and how “she gets home and does her homework all by herself.” One mother thought “single gender has been a good thing for her while in elementary school because she can focus more on her school” and “gives them the opportunity to actually focus on their schoolwork” (Sarah’s mother, personal communication, October 10, 2016).

Teachers at Hopkins Elementary from kindergarten to fifth grade discussed how work ethic was evident in the students in their single-gender classrooms. Ms. Batson (personal communication, October 6, 2016) noted, “they have had success just because they have become, they are more independent, and their learning styles are different.” Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 12, 2016) agreed with Ms. Batson sharing “they are just a little bit more anxious to learn and be engaged.” Ms. McKinney replied with an example she had noticed over the years that

when you have boys and girls in the class if a girl sees a boy finishing their work they will hurry up and finish theirs quicker so they can’t say that the boy finished their work before they did. But you don’t see that. They’re much more conscientious and take their time and are determined to do a better job. (M. McKinney, personal communication, October 12, 2016)

Ms. Hadley (personal communication, October 6, 2016) reported how girls especially those who “have been in long term” are “extremely independent” and “they don’t ask as many questions. They look at it, they assess it. They try to figure out what they are supposed to do and they go with it.” She continued to share how “the girls . . . are just like I’ve got this. I know where to go with this. Boom! Independent, taking it on, taking charge and doing the work.” One teacher

shared how the girls' "motivation is a little bit stronger [and] I feel like they want to come to school" (F. Fletcher, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

Willingness to try. All participants gave examples of how single-gender classrooms impacted the girls' willingness to try harder or try new things. The first evidence of this came from the students' acrostic poems. Within the poems, phrases such as "never give up," "give your best," "learn new things," "never give up even if you do a mistake," "learning," "eager to learn new things," (LaKeisha, Lola, Sarah, & Sasha, written acrostic poems, October 2016).

Lola's mother (personal communication, October 6, 2016) noted an example that took place last year in fourth grade that exhibited a willingness to try. Lola had expressed that science was a weakness academically. However, Lola's mother noticed how

last year she loved science. She loved the science project and apparently her three friends, and her won the science fair that they were doing. So it was kind of amazing because, I mean, when I was growing up I wanted to be on that, and apparently she got it, she did it! And the teacher said last year [Hopkins] had never won anything like that, so it was kind of good that they were smart. (personal communication, October 6, 2016)

Mr. Grayhawk (personal communication, October 6, 2016) explained how

where [some students] may have had some reservations about science or math...they found that they could be successful for that because there was no one there to make them look like they weren't successful...they have found success...experienced success...and because of that they are confident that they can do the things that they might not have been if they had been in a co-ed class and having to deal with the stressors that go along with being a girl...in a co-ed classroom.

Ms. Hadley agreed with Mr. Grayhawk and Ms. Fletcher. She explained how in her single-gender classroom she puts a “positive spin” on everything and thus “changes their outlook” which in turn allows the girls “to focus...and they are willing to try [new things] and to kind of get in there and get dirty with it” (H. Hadley, personal communication, October 6, 2016). She gave an example of how her class was “willing to step out on a limb” because they felt “secure and safe” and knew “no one was going to laugh at them.” She continued sharing how they don’t have to worry about a boy thinking they are not smart or asking a dumb question. They are just able to ask, and they don’t even preface it with this might be a dumb question. They just ask it, and it is because that fear is not there. And it is because they do feel confident and because they are used to taking those risks. (H. Hadley, personal communication, October 6, 2016)

Another example given by Ms. Hadley (personal communication, October 12, 2016) shared how single-gender classrooms “give them confidence” which “[she] thinks it helps them be risk takers and willing to try things out without knowing 100% the outcome.” She continued with an example of how in non-Title I schools she could see students “with this furrowed brow kind of contemplating do I raise my hand do I not raise my hand because I’m not sure about the answer” while students in Title I single-gender early elementary classrooms “they’re just going to think about it, they’re confident, they’re going to move, and they’re not worried about the ridicule or whether they are going to get it wrong or right, they are just doing their best” (H. Hadley, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

Ms. Miller (personal communication, October 12, 2016) noticed that even in “the first-grade [single-gender] classroom that they are more confident to tell their answers to things and talk about things” because “they felt more comfortable.” She continued by comparing when she

taught co-ed “the girls wouldn’t try certain things like with science they wouldn’t get in with the experiment” and now in the single-gender classroom

there’s not any boys there to get in on the experiment in front of them so even if they are not ready to take the initiative, it may take them a minute to do it, but they will actually have enough confidence to be successful in something they might not if they are in a co-ed room. (M. Miller, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 12, 2016) discussed that in single-gender classrooms

The girls are less inhibited, and they are quick to answer in math and to participate in science because they don’t feel like they are being overwhelmed by the boys or where the boys tell them this is the way it is going to be. They feel free to initiate and respond and participate in things...definitely less fear of being embarrassed.

She then shared an example of a student who was in her first year of single-gender education in the fifth grade. Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 12, 2016) described how at the beginning of the year “she would not participate in math, she would not raise her hand to answer a question” but by the end of the year “in that class ... nurtured...she was answering...coming up to the board and it didn’t matter if it was wrong...there was no fear of being wrong and being ridiculed or made fun of...she just felt comfortable coming up and trying.”

Academic strengths. Students, parents, and teachers participants all responded with experiences and examples of how the single-gender early elementary classrooms impacted the students academically. Also, the examples explored how the girls perceived themselves in the academic realm with strengths, weaknesses, and grades.

Within the acrostic poems, multiple students referred to themselves as “intelligent” and “smart” (Chanelle, Lola, & Sasha, written acrostic poems, October 2016). When discussing their academic strengths in the early elementary years, two girls noted their strengths as mathematics, one as reading, one as science, and one as social studies. They noted their weaknesses included three with science, three with social studies and one as mathematics (Chanelle, Kassie, LaKeisha, Lola, Sarah, Sasha, & Shay, personal communication, October 6-12, 2016). The girls then shared that moving into late elementary some of their strengths and weaknesses stayed the same while some changed. The students shared how three of them were now strongest in mathematics, two in reading, and two in social studies while the weaknesses changed to one with grammar, one with social studies, one with reading, two with mathematics, and two with science (Chanelle, Kassie, LaKeisha, Lola, Sarah, Sasha, & Shay, personal communication, October 4-12, 2016). Kassie (personal communication, October 18, 2016) noted how she changed from reading to mathematics as her strength because “when I do math I get A’s.” One girl shared how single-gender early elementary classrooms “helps you make good grades” (Lola, personal communication, October 13, 2016). Shay (personal communication, October 10, 2016) revealed that she was “proud of [her]self” because she was “making good grades.”

Chanelle (personal communication, October 10, 2016) explained that being in single-gender classrooms from kindergarten to second grade helped her in third through fifth grade because “it helped me to focus more and...work harder and try to get like to get over my last grades” and “it helped me get better with my hardest subject” and “now I get A’s on my science tests.” Another student chimed in stating how single-gender classrooms help because “if you are struggling in a certain subject, you can let it out” but “boys think that you don’t know anything” (Sasha, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She also explained how “you can get A’s

and B's and if you know the stuff from first and second grade and kindergarten it can help you in fourth and fifth grade" (Sasha, personal communication, October 6, 2016).

Parents were quick to brag on their students for their good grades. Chanelle's mother (personal communication, October 6, 2016) noted how "she's excelling at math," "she really likes science," and "she's on the A honor roll...couldn't ask for any more than that." She continued by stating that she "loved [single gender] and [how] they focus on math and science...because a lot of girls don't focus on that." Sasha's mother (personal communication, October 4, 2016) shared how "she is testing on MAP and everything she tested above average. She is doing really good. She is benefitting a lot from the learning that she is receiving."

The teachers and principal also noted the increase of academics amongst the students in the single-gender classrooms. Ms. Rogers (personal communication, October 4, 2016) noted how "the science and the math [was] a big [benefit] too in the early elementary years as "it really breaks a lot of [the girls] out of their shell...we can just learn together and at our own pace...we don't have to be embarrassed or shy." Ms. Rogers (personal communication, October 4, 2016) shared an example she found interesting this year

I have two students that have siblings in other third-grade classes. And the two students I have are very outgoing...one is an ESOL student but a higher functioning ESOL student...and the other student I have is in challenge. The other two [not her students but the siblings] struggle academically. Now I'm not saying single gender is the reason for that, but it is interesting to even see personality wise. I know siblings are very different but just to see that though that the ones that have been in single gender...I just see a big difference like seeing them walk down the hall like they are more outgoing and I don't know if that is just a coincidence. But I think they have that self-confidence.

Research Question Four

Data and detailed descriptions of participant responses to student individual interview questions 19 through 22, parent individual interview questions 2 through 4, teacher individual questions 5 through 7, student focus group questions 6 through 7, and the teacher focus group question 3 provided data for the fourth research question of “How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls’ future plans?” The data analysis revealed that four codes centered on the impact single-gender early elementary classrooms had on the girls’ future plans. The codes included middle and high school, college, career, and where we will live. As all participants’ data were analyzed, it was noted how the poverty the students live within kept being shared and referred to as a backdrop to where they came from and were expected to go in the future. However, the theme of a bright future outside of the poverty they currently live in evolved from these four codes. As students, parents, and teachers alike shared their thoughts, questions, and hopes for the future, the common thread was how their futures are bright because they have a plan and are ready to put that plan into action based upon the foundation laid in the single-gender early elementary classrooms at Hopkins Elementary.

Middle and high school. Within the interviews and focus groups, both parents and teachers alike questioned if being in a single-gender elementary classroom since kindergarten would be a drawback once the girls returned to co-educational classes in middle school. None of the students expressed concern over being moved back into co-educational classes with boys once in middle school. Mr. Grayhawk (personal communication, October 6, 2016) noted how “on a positive sense though that they’ve still had time to interact with the opposite sex through related arts, through recess and other activities.”

As students answered the question of if they would like to continue in single-gender classrooms in middle school if offered, the answer was a resounding yes from all but one student. Kassie (personal communication, October 18, 2016) preferred to go back to co-educational classes “because it is something different.” However, another student commented, “yes because it is a lot of change and I want to be with the same people” (Sarah, personal communication, October 13, 2016). Sasha’s (personal communication, October 6, 2016) response to why she wanted to stay in single-gender was “because I want to be in single gender for the rest of my life.”

However, the teachers and principal at Hopkins Elementary shared their thoughts on how single-gender early elementary classrooms have impacted the students in them currently and even shared two accounts of past single-gender students that are currently in middle school. The impacts described by the teachers and principal included impacts both with perceptions of self and perceptions of education. The kindergarten teacher, Ms. Batson (personal communication, October 8, 2016) expressed how they

are trying to build a strong foundation ... in such a high poverty area....I feel like if we instill those values early on and we continue that through fifth grade ...then they will carry that with them throughout their school years.

Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 12, 2016) agreed that “their confidence they have gained in these early years to where they have a voice now and they can strengthen that [over the years].” The confidence going into middle school was explained by Ms. Miller (personal communication, October 12, 2016) when she shared “teaching them to be more confident in kindergarten and first...would teach them to be more confident once they get to high school...they have a voice and are able to speak out regardless of what society thinks.”

Several teachers commented on how their students would be better prepared for middle school academically because of single-gender early elementary classrooms, especially in the areas of mathematics and science (G. Grayhawk, H. Hadley, M. McKinney, & M. Miller, personal communication, October 4-12, 2016). Mr. Grayhawk (personal communication, October 6, 2016) noted how

it also will help the girls...understand the differences between what is perceived traditional boy or traditional girl activities and responses because they have been successful in a situation where it may have not been as traditional. They were successful in math. They were successful in science. So because of that success, they may not be as hesitant to go into careers or those route in coursework that they might have shied away from.

Ms. Hadley (personal communication, October 12, 2016) agreed with Mr. Grayhawk because “they are going to be full of knowledge that some kids don’t get because they weren’t afraid to ask those questions.” One teacher explained how when the students enter middle school and high school she “thinks their confidence especially in science and math help make them more confident” and “they’ll have that high self-esteem, and then they won’t have to worry about some of those other pressures because we’ve built that in them to be confident” (R. Rogers, personal communication, October 4, 2016)

Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 12, 2016) shared an example of two students who went through the single-gender program at Hopkins Elementary from kindergarten through fifth grade and are now eighth graders at a co-educational middle school. She explained how “one is class vice president and the other one is president, and I was like they went through single gender...yeah, I think that is proof right there that you know it works. They do have

confidence.” She also discussed how “the ones in middle school that have come back, I’ve just been amazed at the self-confidence and how active they are in middle school...I would like to think that would not have happened if we had not laid the foundation” (M. McKinney, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 12, 2016) agreed how

in elementary school we are laying that foundation. We are conditioning them to have that confidence and once they are conditioned it is just self-nature. You don’t care about who is around you know you, you have a voice, and you’ve been taught that through the years you know, and it’s been accepted, and I can continue so I don’t think it is something that is going to end [in middle school]. It’s just going to keep going.

College. Two of the seven parent participants did not complete high school, two either graduated from high school or earned their GED, two parents received some college credits, and only one parent had a trade or vocational training according to the demographic surveys completed by the parents (Demographic surveys, 2016). However, all of the parents set goals for their daughters to attend college and encouraged them to do better than they had done with their education. Sasha’s mother’s (personal communication, October 4, 2016) educational goal for Sasha is to

make sure she finishes up school and goes off to college and like I said she can be whatever she wants to be. She has days where she just wants to be a singer and I’m like that is fine too but we still are going to college you can do both.

LaKeisha’s mother (personal communication, October 13, 2016) shared her educational goal for LaKeisha as

“definitely for them [LaKeisha and her siblings] not to get on the wrong track as I did when I was a teenager. But to go to school and be happy about what they learn and what they are doing. And whatever you do be happy and enjoy doing it. Finish school. If you want to go to college whatever you want to do the opportunity is there.

However, it was not just the parents who had goals for the girls but their teachers as well. All the teachers spoke of how college discussions were important and often held in their classrooms which started as early as kindergarten with Ms. Batson. Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 12, 2016) commented that single-gender early elementary classrooms definitely benefit because even now they encourage one another to do better. They talk about college even in second grade. They talk about college and what they want to do in the future. And they can share those experiences out loud.

Fourth-grade teacher Ms. Hadley (personal communication, October 12, 2016) revealed how the students respond to college discussions in her classroom:

All of my girls say they are going to college. Where I did my student teaching, I did fifth grade, and my girls were not even talking about college. And I’m with fourth grade now and they all say I’m going to college and I’m going to [named a local university] or I’m going to [named another major university]. But they see their future as in getting an education and having a career as opposed to working in the service industry. So I see them wanting and actually planning which is half of it.

All but one of the girls, LaKeisha, plan to graduate from high school and go straight to college. She planned to be a baker and believed that college would be too difficult (LaKeisha, personal communication, October 12, 2016). However, LaKeisha’s mother (personal communication, October 10, 2016) was determined that she will, in fact, go to college When the

students discussed why they should go to college, Kassie (personal communication, October 12, 2016) shared how “you need to get a good education. My mom always says because you don’t want to be the bum walking around on the street asking for money.” Another student chimed in stating how she wanted to go to college “because I can have a career and I can be anything I want if I go to college” and that once there she can “learn new things” (Chanelle, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Sasha (personal communication, October 12, 2016) believed that college is important and she should go to “get my education.” One girl insisted that she would go to college to “graduate and get my college degree” (Shay, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Shay was seeing this first hand as her mother is currently enrolled in college working on her degree. Shay’s mother (personal communication, October 7, 2016) shared her discussion about college with her daughters

Because I am in college now and I have discussed with them that college is good for them to go, and hopefully they don’t wait ‘til I do. ’Til they done had kids and go back to school. I want them to go to college right after they graduate from high school.

Lola and Sarah already knew not just that they were going to college but had picked out the colleges they wanted to attend. Lola (personal communication, October 13, 2016) named a local private university about thirty minutes from her home where she “want[ed] to study.” Sarah mentioned a major university about an hour away from home. She commented how her parents told her she “need[ed] to get good grades to go to college and get a good career” and that “your brothers didn’t go so you can go and be the first one to go to college” (Sarah, personal communication, October 13, 2016).

Ms. Hadley reiterated how the goals, both educational and career wise, were planned. However, she went on to explain how the success they were planning was different than that of their families. She stated,

My students, when we talk about families and what they are going to do with their life and their goals, they see their parents just trying to make it, to survive. Their thoughts are not in survival now. Their thoughts are I'm going to be this; I'm going to have these goals. It's not just about survival...it's about doing the best they can and making something for themselves. Making themselves proud, making their families proud, having a way to support their family. I'm going to be a doctor, or I'm going to be a lawyer, and I'm going to help take care of my family. And they don't mean their futuristic family they mean... their family now. And so it's not just in survival mode like they see. They look beyond that, and that's what they want. (H. Hadley, personal communication, October 12, 2016)

Careers. Within each interview and focus group, participants noted the influence single-gender early elementary classrooms had upon not just going to college but their plans for a career. All student participants shared their future career plans. Careers ranged from a hair stylist to a pianist, to a veterinarian, to a baker. While these careers did not necessarily match up with the career paths their parents mentioned such as a doctor or a writer, all parents expressed the importance and desire for their daughters have a career. The parent participants outlined their careers via the demographic surveys they completed.

Along with the parents, the single-gender elementary teachers also believed that the girls would go on to have careers and be successful due to the foundations they received in the single-gender early elementary classrooms (B. Baskin, F. Fletcher, H. Hadley, M. McKinney, & M.

Miller, personal communication, October 4-12, 2016). Ms. Hadley put into words what careers meant to the students, parents, and families in a Title I community. She explained how the single-gender early elementary classrooms would affect their future because

it's going to give them careers and opportunities that many of their families haven't had. It's going to not only take them places that most people don't even, you know in this area, don't think about. And you know when you are raised to think ok, I have a goal, and my goal is college, and I'm going to get a career because I want to do something with my life when you hear that your entire life that is what you go for. It's not oh I guess I will work at Burger King or something. It is I've got this goal and let's work for it. (H. Hadley, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 4, 2016) echoed Ms. Hadley's sentiments as she shared how "they are talking about college, they are talking about career choices instead of just like a job or you know finished high school. And I think that comes from being in single-gender classrooms." Another teacher commented how single gender is "empowering women [as] we show them that they can be whatever they want to be and so you know they, we dream big and show them that they can be anything" (R. Rogers, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

Where we will live. Each of the students' families has lived in the Hopkins community for at least eleven years with five of the seven families living in the community for at least 21 years (Demographic surveys, 2016). The students discussed where they planned to live once they grew up and why. Only Sarah and Lola wanted to stay and live within the Hopkins community. Sarah (personal communication, October 13, 2016) noted how she did not "want to move away from [her] family." Lola (personal communication, October 13, 2016) agreed with

Sarah and shared how staying in the same city “makes [her] feel more comfortable than living in other states or countries.”

The other five students all planned to move outside of their local community. Sasha (personal communication, October 6, 2016) wanted to move to New York City because “I like it because a big city” and “you get to explore new things.” Another student planned a big city move to Atlanta, Georgia, because “it has lots of stuff and I think I would be more successful getting a job there” (Chanelle, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Kassie (personal communication, October 13, 2016) noted she wants to live in a bigger city about 30 minutes away because “you don’t want your parents like keep coming over all the time.” LaKeisha shared how she too wanted to move to another large city about 45 miles away from Hopkins. She said she wants “a big [neighborhood] because if you are in a little neighborhood there are little houses that you can’t live in” and “there are big houses with stairs [and a] nice kitchen” (LaKeisha, personal communication, October 13, 2016). Shay (personal communication, October 10, 2016) revealed that although she used to want to move to Hollywood, California, that she now wants to move to Columbia, South Carolina, because it is a big city and “looks good over there” and chose it because of “[her] teacher.”

Summary

Chapter four of this case study described the experiences fourth and fifth-grade girls, from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, had in their in single-gender, early elementary classrooms (kindergarten through second) in Hopkins Elementary School (pseudonym), related to their perceptions of education and self. The study also included the related perceptions of their parents, their teachers, and their principal. Purposeful sampling identified the participants. All seven of the student participants received single-gender education beginning in kindergarten; the

seven parent participants were the parents of the student participants, the seven teachers were teachers of single-gender girls' classes at Hopkins Elementary (representing each grade level kindergarten through fifth), and the principal of Hopkins Elementary.

Data triangulation was achieved by utilizing the descriptions participants provided of their stories and experiences through perceptions in their own words, interviews, focus groups, and surveys, in addition to background document analysis (Yin, 2009). I utilized ATLAS.ti's software program to digitally identify initial codes and theme identifications of the written prompts, interviews, and focus groups. I also verified these initial codes and themes via hand coding. I organized each of these codes and linked them to the four research questions. The themes identified, in the order of the research questions, included community, personal identity, academic perseverance, and bright future.

The case study indicated how the single-gender early elementary classrooms at Hopkins Elementary created a community of learners among the girls that was more than just a community but a family for those girls in each classroom. The students described their personal identities in their own words sharing their confidence and self-esteem. Their parents and teachers echoed the boost in confidence and self-esteem among the girls. Students, parents, and teachers alike described the work ethic and willingness to try amongst the students. The strengths and weaknesses in academic subjects detailed how generally "weak" subjects such as mathematics and science for girls were no longer considered weaknesses. Finally, the participants expressed how the students were not just hoping for a future or being content with what their parents have, but they have created goals and plans for not just middle and high school, but college, careers, and where they will live in the future.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this single case study was to describe the experiences fourth, and fifth-grade girls had in their kindergarten through second grade, single-gender classrooms and the impact of these classes upon their perceptions of education and self. In this case study, I focused on the participants' descriptions of their stories and experiences. The participants included seven students in the fourth and fifth grade who had participated in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten, their seven parents, six teachers, and one principal that currently teach single-gender girls' classes. Data collection included document analysis, interviews, focus groups, written prompts by the students, and a demographic survey which was completed by the parents. Data were analyzed using the Atlas.ti software system as a tool to help code and identify themes and then were re-coded by hand for verification before organizing the codes into themes. Within this chapter, I will include a summary of the findings by the research questions and themes and a discussion of the identified themes about the empirical and theoretical literature. A section will be included sharing the implications of this study theoretically, empirically, and practically. Delimitations and limitations along with suggestions for future research are noted before concluding the chapter with a summary.

Summary of Findings

After collecting and analyzing data collected through the case study from a diverse group of participants, I coded the data utilizing the Atlas.ti software and validated the coding by hand. After completing the coding, it was organized and grouped allowing four main themes to emerge. The four themes included community, personal identity, academic perseverance, and bright futures. These themes were analyzed and broken down into sub-themes illustrated in

Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4. The analysis of data along with the quotations from each of the participants provided the evidence needed to answer each of the research questions in this study.

The following discussion explains how each of the research questions informed the study:

1. What experiences did fourth and fifth-grade girls have in their single-gender early elementary classrooms?

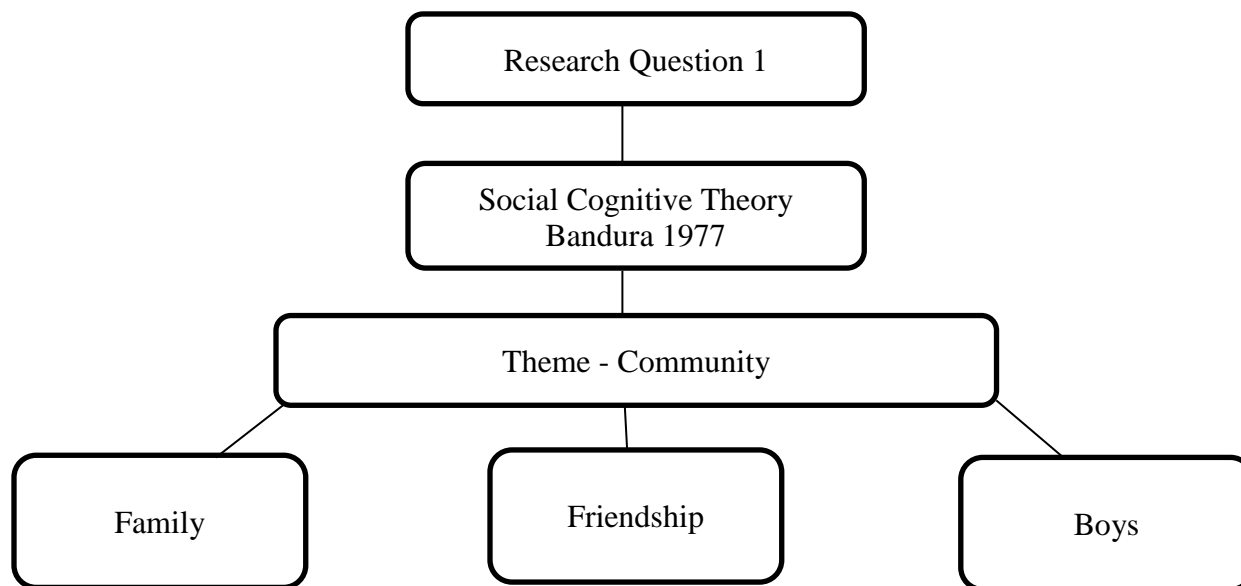


Figure 1

Graphic organizer depicting how the research question two related to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977), the overall theme, and the sub-themes.

All 21 participants revealed through their descriptions that the single-gender early elementary classrooms did impact the girls that experienced them. From the students' first-hand experiences and through the eyes of their parents, teachers, and principal the theme of community emerged. I noted three sub-themes that supported the overarching theme of community, included family, friendship, and boys as illustrated in Figure 1.

The first sub-theme for research question one was family. As the students described their experiences and their classrooms, they did not begin descriptions like one would expect with the physical descriptions. Instead, the seven students described their classroom as a family. The

students likened their group of girls to a family where they were as sisters and could openly share their opinions and work together for the good of the whole. The parent and teacher participants spoke how the students considered themselves to be sisters and cousins inside the classroom. This sense of family was noted by all participants to help support the students in building the community quicker than the average classroom does at the beginning of each year. The teachers noted that even as new class members joined throughout the years, the students would clap and cheer for them as a welcome to the family. The family atmosphere served to give the students the flexibility, as Ms. Miller (personal communication, October 12, 2016) shared, to feel free to make mistakes, to try new things, and to be open with one another. Thus the single-gender classroom created a community of learners that increased not only their confidence but also their academics.

The second sub-theme for research question one was friendship. The students shared experience after experience about how they learned with their friends, played with their friends, and shared with their friends. As the students described these friendships, it was evident the friendships were not just casual acquaintances in the classroom. Chanelle (personal communication, October 6, 2016) described experiences of getting advice from one another. All students noted the importance of the friendships as they did not just have friends to play with but encouragement and respect for each other which allowed them to get along and learn alongside each other. As they reflected on their daughters' experiences, all six of the parents discussed how the girls had created lasting friendships that built each other's self-esteem and confidence. Mr. Grayhawk (personal communication, October 6, 2016) expressed how the comradery in the groups of girls is one of the major strengths of the program as it gives students the freedom to work and learn together in a supportive environment.

Through the third sub-theme for research question one, the participants revealed the impact classrooms without boys had on their experiences. It did not take long before all participants brought up the impact that such classrooms had on the girls in them. The impact brought the discussion of both benefits and drawbacks. The benefits discussed by the girls included how they were able to concentrate and focus because they were not being picked on or teased by the boys. They shared how boys could make them feel uncomfortable, thus impacting their willingness to participate. Benefits outlined by the parents and teachers reiterated those identified by the girls. Ms. Fletcher and Ms. Hadley (personal communication, October 12, 2016) voiced how the girls were willing to step out and try because they were not worried about boys thinking they were not smart enough or laughing at them. The overall feeling from all participants noted the girls were able to flourish in the single-gender classroom because they did not have boys as distractions and were willing and able to step up more than they would in a co-educational classroom experience.

The drawbacks mentioned amongst parents and teachers focused primarily on the lack of continued single-gender classrooms once the girls entered middle school and how the girls would react to being back in a co-educational setting. However, Mr. Grayhawk (personal communication, October 6, 2016) explained that the girls were not isolated from boys as they mingled for recess, after school programs, lunch, and other special events. One teacher shared that girls visiting from middle school had indicated that the transition was smooth and several had even excelled to become president and vice president of their eighth-grade classes (M. McKinney, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Although the participants noted these as possible drawbacks for the girls, all participants believed the benefits far outweighed the possible drawbacks for the girls in the single-gender program at Hopkins Elementary.

2. How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls' perceptions of themselves?

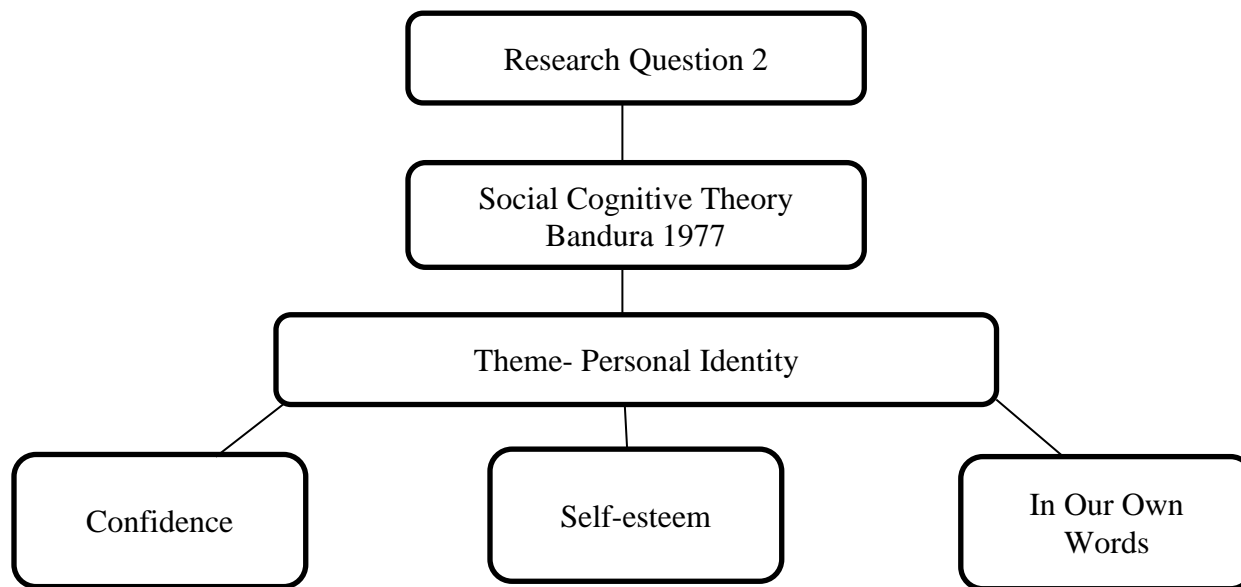


Figure 2

Graphic organizer depicting how the research question two related to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977), the overall theme, and the sub-themes.

One of the largest benefits for the girls in single-gender early elementary classrooms was the impact it had on the girls' personal identity according to the data analyzed. I noted three sub-themes of confidence, self-esteem, and in our own words that supported the overarching theme of personal identity as illustrated in Figure 2.

The first sub-theme for research question two of confidence began to exude from the girls because of the single-gender early elementary classrooms. Girls expressed their confidence by explaining how they could be themselves and have courage. They identified adjectives such as outgoing, courageous, intelligent, and confident to describe themselves that directly detailed this confidence. The confidence was also evident in their experiences of stepping out and trying regardless of possibly making mistakes. Their parents agreed with this confidence by sharing experiences of girls who were shy at the beginning of their school years and were now out-going

and confident. Parents expressed their excitement and gratitude for the single-gender classrooms helping to build the confidence of the girls, which impacted their personal identity and in their academics. Teachers agreed that self-confidence was evident in the girls in their classrooms. Examples shared about students, and their confidence included them speaking out, taking risks, breaking out of their shells, answering questions, and sharing opinions. Ms. Batson and Ms. Miller (personal communication, October 12, 2016) believed this confidence gave the girls their own voices which should stay with them into their futures and impact the generational poverty that many of the girls live in.

The second sub-theme for research question two was self-esteem. Chanelle (personal communication, October 6, 2016) summed up the feelings of all of the students when she explained how “single-gender made me love myself even more.” The students demonstrated their self-esteem through their explanations of how they were allowed and encouraged to be themselves, to be anything they wanted to be, and to be their own person no matter what. Parents and teachers shared how self-esteem boosted amongst the girls. They noted it was evident when they had seen themselves as successful. This internalization, teachers shared, would impact their current education and self as well as their futures regarding poise, confidence, and academics.

The third sub-theme for research question two was in our [their] own words. The participants articulated how the girls personally identified themselves today based on the experiences they have had over the last 5 to 6 years while in single-gender classrooms. The girls utilized the acrostic poem on single-gender classrooms to voice their beliefs of themselves. When girls responded to the poem, they were able to write anything to share their opinions on single-gender classrooms. However, instead of writing about the actual class or classroom, all

student participants used their own words to share their personal identities and the identities of their families and friends in the classroom. Words articulated within the poems were vivid descriptions of how the girls felt. The words ranged in variety from determined and self-motivated to devoted, self-confident, and encouraging. Additionally, the girls cited specific character traits to describe who they were in their own powerful words. Several of the character traits mentioned by the girls included unique, honest, smart, hard-working, trustworthy, and confident. Two students mentioned how they were “impressed [with] myself” and “proud of myself” (LaKeisha & Shay, personal communication, October 10, 2016).

3. How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls’ perceptions of education?

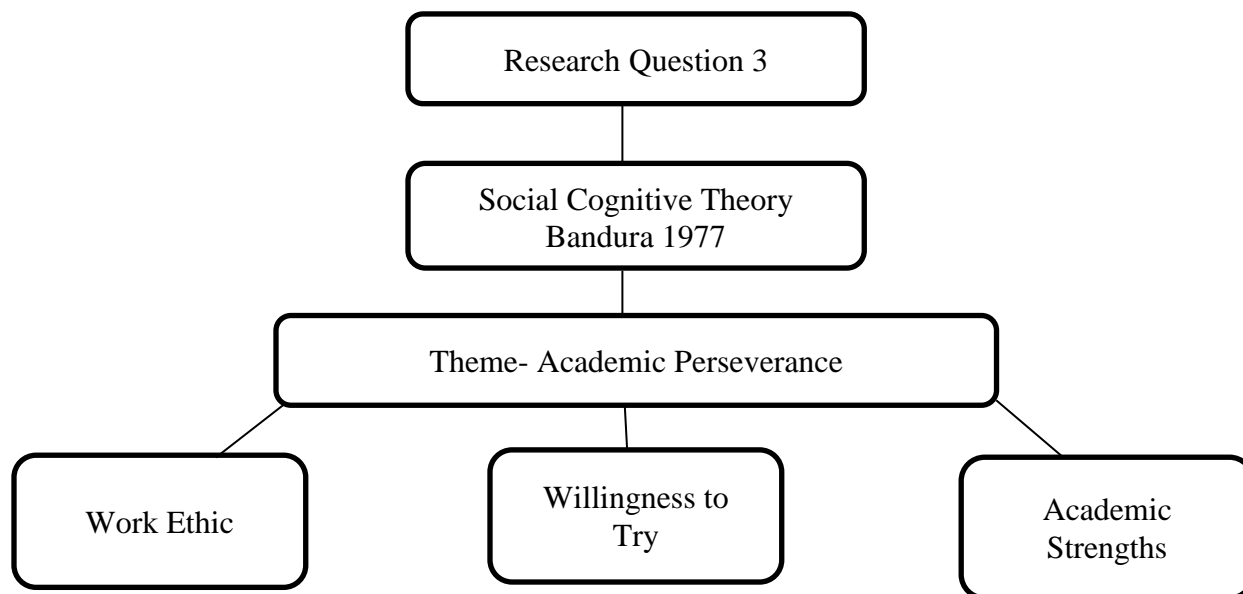


Figure 3

Graphic organizer depicting how the research question three related to Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1977), the overall theme, and the sub-themes.

Through data analysis, the participants communicated their beliefs about the impact of the single-gender early elementary classrooms on the girls’ academic success. Thus, I created the theme of academic perseverance. I noted three sub-themes of work ethic, willingness to try, and

strengths and weaknesses that support the overarching theme of academic perseverance as illustrated in Figure 3.

The first sub-theme for research question three was work ethic. The girls described how being in the single-gender classrooms encouraged them to work hard and give their best at all times. Each of the girls addressed work ethic either in their acrostic, interview, or focus group. The girls revealed the importance of being willing to try, to make mistakes, to focus, to concentrate, and to persevere no matter what life or school brought to them. They shared examples of how the girls in the class would cheer them on and encourage them to try their best and not give up because they could do it and they would do it if they stuck with it. Parents addressed the work ethic of the girls. An example was that Lola would get upset if picked up early because she would not be able to get her work done (Lola's mother, personal communication, October 6, 2016). Parents expressed how the girls' experiences built their work ethic and enthusiasm towards school and learning. Teachers agreed with the other participants and discussed how not only are they more willing to do the work but are working conscientiously and with a determination to do their best.

The second sub-theme for research question three was the girls' willingness to try. The girls explained this by sharing values of a strong work ethic such as never giving up, trying one's best, and above all, being willing and able to try new things. Lola's mother (personal communication, October 6, 2016) shared an example of Lola and two girls participating in the science fair. While to others, this might not mean much, but this was the first time Hopkins Elementary has won a science fair, and it was by three girls in a single-gender classroom. This example showed that the girls were willing to try something new and in a subject they considered a weakness. The teachers described how the girls were willing to try, no matter what. Ms.

Hadley (H. Hadley, personal communication, October 12, 2016) discussed the importance of taking risks and trying new things. She believed the girls had an increase in willingness to try because of the increase in the feeling of family community and the increase in perceptions of self-confidence and self-esteem.

The third sub-theme for research question three was strengths within academic subjects. According to the teachers and principal, mathematics and science were normally a struggle for girls because they do not like them and because boys tend to jump ahead of the girls in these subjects. However, the girls noted that while these subjects may have been a weakness in their early elementary years, now it is a strength because of single-gender early elementary classrooms. The girls described themselves as smart and intelligent students who got good grades. Sasha (personal communication, October 6, 2016) explained how she had to try hard and because she tried hard she would get better grades and thus get A's and B's. Parents made the correlation between being in the single-gender classroom and their grades. The parents shared with excitement how their girls that had been in single-gender classrooms were excelling in mathematics and science and were on the All-A Honor Roll. Teachers explained the impact on the girls' academic strengths and weaknesses. Especially about science and mathematics, the girls had opportunities to use their confidence without the interruptions by the boys. Once they had found success in these subjects, the desire and hope of parents and teachers was for the girls to internalize these experiences and successes and then utilize them in the future when they encounter weaknesses they could change to strengths.

4. How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact fourth and fifth-grade girls' future plans?

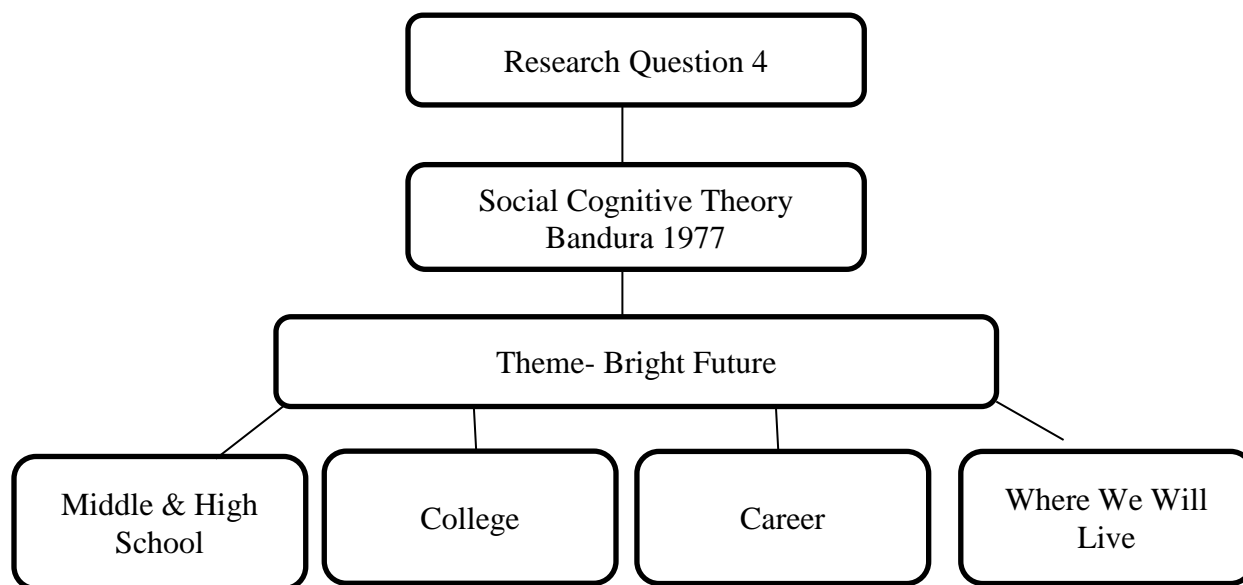


Figure 4

Graphic organizer depicting how the research question four related to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977), the overall theme, and the sub-themes.

The data analysis revealed the participant beliefs regarding the impact of single-gender early elementary classrooms on the girls' futures. The theme of bright futures emerged. I noted three sub-themes of middle and high school, college, careers and where they would live that supported the overarching theme as illustrated in Figure 4.

The first sub-theme for research question four was about the middle and high school experiences for the girls once leaving the single-gender classrooms in the elementary school. Six of the seven girls noted how they would prefer to continue in single-gender into the middle and high school if it were offered to them. However, for these girls, there are no options for single-gender programs once they leave Hopkins Elementary. The one who wanted to go back to co-educational did not choose it because she did not like single-gender education but felt that going to a co-educational classroom would be a different opportunity. The girls who wanted single-

gender classrooms in middle school shared that the reason was that of to the family they had created in elementary school and all-girl classes, there would not be boys there to pick and tease. Parents and teachers agreed that single-gender classrooms in middle school would be beneficial but knew that it is not an option in the Hopkins community. While many discussed that switching back to co-educational classrooms could be a drawback, the teachers and principal offered that the girls' new found confidence, self-esteem, work ethic, and willingness to try created a strong foundation upon which to build the middle and high school. While single-gender classrooms would no longer provide the girls with the family and comradery they had in elementary school, the successes they had, the voice they had created, and the goals they had set would hopefully continue. Shay's mother (personal communication, October 7, 2016) spoke of another daughter who was now in middle school who went through the entire single-gender program and shared how it set her path and created who she was and now is thriving because of what she learned in the single-gender classrooms, especially at the early elementary levels.

The second sub-theme for research question four was college. The discussion amongst the girls, parents, and teachers was not whether or not they would go to college but where they would go and what their careers would be. Six of the seven girls indicated that they plan to attend college. Of these six, five had already selected their colleges, and all of these colleges were large universities in 2 hours of their local community. Reasons for college selection ranged from being close to parents to it being the best place to pursue their particular career paths. The girls revealed in their related discussion that if they attend and graduate from college, they will be the first ones in their families to do so. In fact, some of them will be the first to graduate from high school. Parents expressed their desire to see their daughters be happy in doing what they want to do but instilling in them the expectation of college. Many parents noted the girls'

desires to go to college started from discussions at school. The teachers explained how the students, as early as second grade, had not just discussed college but had created goals for college. Ms. Hadley (personal communication, October 12, 2016) noted the fifth graders in her previous non-Title I school had not begun to discuss, much less set goals, for college, but at Hopkins Elementary her girls had their plans and goals set by fourth grade.

The third sub-theme for research question four was careers. This sub-theme mirrored the sub-theme of college in that all seven of the students had planned and set goals for their future career. The students had chosen careers that ranged from being a pianist to a veterinarian. Kassie (personal communication, October 13, 2016) shared that it was important to get a career so one would not be a bum on the road. Other students agreed with Kassie about the need and importance of having a career and going to college to prepare for it. The parents noted careers that were not identical matches to those the girls had planned; they insisted the girls would have a career and make it farther than they had. Several parents encouraged the girls to be what they wanted to be as long as they were happy and did choose a career. The teachers gave detailed accounts of conversations with students about their future careers and the pathways to reach these goals. Ms. Hadley and Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 12, 2016) noticed the girls were talking about careers instead of just finishing high school and getting a job. Other teachers added to the discussion of how single-gender classrooms at this level empower the girls and instill the foundations, such as confidence and work ethic, needed to be successful in these careers.

The fourth sub-theme for research question four was where they would live. The parents shared through the demographic surveys that five of the seven had lived in the local community for 21 plus years. The other two parents had lived in the community for at least 15 years. All

students, except for one, wanted to move outside of the local community. The one who wanted to stay said her career could be within this local community and she wanted to be close to her family. The other six students chose larger cities to move to that were at least 45 minutes away. The other cities included New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; and Columbia, South Carolina. The girls shared that they preferred to go to larger cities because there was more to do there along with more opportunities for future careers.

Discussion

The following discussion addresses the findings of this case study in relationship to the qualitative empirical research and theoretical framework upon which the study was founded. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the experiences and impact of single-gender education in early elementary classrooms (grades kindergarten through second) from the perspectives of the fourth and fifth-grade girls that experienced these classrooms in a low-socioeconomic community in South Carolina at Hopkins Elementary (pseudonym). The theoretical framework guiding this study was Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and explained by Pajares (2002) regarding self-efficacy. SCT supports the notion that people may work together for the good of everyone but yet allows individuals the opportunity to create their future based upon social and environmental interactions (Bandura, 1977). A person's self-efficacy relates to the SCT in that it allows learners to believe that they can learn academically, socially, and individually and apply what they learned to their life both now and in the future (Pajares, 2002). After data analysis, four themes evolved. These themes included community, personal identity, academic perseverance, and bright futures.

Theoretical Literature

In relation to the theoretical literature discussed in Chapter Two, the findings corroborate previous research by Bandura (1977) and his SCT. Spiropoulos (2010) reviewed Bandura's SCT regarding interactions of an individual's thoughts and cognitive behaviors with their environment and their impact on one another. Within this case study, the personal identities of the girls, along with their new academic perseverance skills, were impacted by the single-gender early elementary classrooms they were in from kindergarten through second grade. Bussey and Bandura (1999) explained how SCT is not something that only happens once or just in the early developmental years but is lifelong. Throughout this study, the participants shared how the impact based on the interactions and observations in the single-gender early elementary classroom began early, but the foundation continued to be built upon into the third through fifth-grade years. The teachers and principal at Hopkins Elementary focused on the belief that if these foundations begin at the early age, then the impact will continue throughout their futures starting as early as middle school and continuing through college, careers, and their future lives.

Bussey and Bandura (1999) acknowledged that the SCT grants people the opportunity to work together for good but yet allows for individuals to create their own personal futures based upon these interactions. The data from this case study corroborated research by Bussey and Bandura (1999) because the participants shared how the girls in the single-gender early elementary classrooms work together to create not just a learning community but a close-knit, family community. The girls have created a family community that works together to assist one another but at the same time allows for the girls to grow individually. For example, Lola was able to grow in her personal identity with confidence because in the single-gender classroom, because the family environment created a place where she felt comfortable and willing to take

risks that otherwise she might not have taken. Thus, Lola was able to grow in her confidence and willingness to try new things individually due to the work of the community as a whole. She no longer waited in the background but stepped up in the classroom answering questions and trying out new things such as the science fair (Lola & Lola's mother, personal communication, October 6-13, 2016).

Pajares (2002) discussed how SCT supports teachers and in turn impacts the development of their students. This development can impact a student's self-efficacy which in turn may alter their outcomes in life. Participants shared their experiences confirming the idea of self-efficacy and the impact it has on the girls, not just in the walls of the classroom in elementary school but in their future schooling. Each of the girls in the study described their own personal experiences of the impacts on their lives based upon being in a single-gender early elementary classroom. The girls' experiences impacted their personal identities based mainly on their confidence, self-esteem, academic perseverance, work ethic, willingness to try, and futures based mainly on college, career, and where they will live. A student experienced growth in self-esteem and confidence during her early elementary years which in turn she continued to add to throughout the remainder of her years in a single-gender classroom. This confidence encouraged her to work hard and try things she would not have previously tried. When she struggled with mathematics and science, she worked harder so that she would not fail and she would make better grades. Thus, Kassie grew not only academically and socially, but she developed her own self-efficacy (personal communication, October 17, 2016).

Bandura's (1988) four main sources of perceived self-efficacy (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological state) were each presented in the case study. Bandura (1994) noted the mastery experiences occur with an individual's resiliency in

their efforts including “perseverance] in the face of adversity and quickly rebound[ing] from setbacks” (p. 72). Throughout the study, the girls along with their parents and teachers expressed experiences of ways the girls and their families have experienced setbacks and adversity with the major one being the families living below the poverty line and all the girls receiving free lunch via Title I. The girls in the single-gender early elementary classrooms see other girls who are similar to them modeling successes and failures in their classroom. As the girls see other girls experiencing successes or learning from their mistakes, they are more likely to learn through these experiences and thus build their self-efficacy. For example, Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 12, 2016) described the opportunity the girls had to practice their confidence and self-esteem through an experience at a local upscale restaurant in downtown. The girls had the opportunity to grow and learn from one another in this experience. This opportunity gave the girls the chance to put their skills into action in a place they most would have never had the opportunity to go and experience on their own or with their families due to their Title I status. However, the single-gender classroom provided the environment needed to not only build this self-efficacy in each girl but to impact possibly to change their futures. As far as social persuasion, the girls’ goals and plans for college and careers were an example of how the single-gender classroom and teachers had convinced the girls through verbal persuasion that they can do something because they have the capabilities to do so. Shay had the plan to go to college and graduate with a future career as a veterinarian. She shared how she determined to go to a state university that is well-known for its veterinarian program because her teacher encouraged her to go there to get her degree (Shay, personal communication, October 10, 2016).

The last part of self-efficacy is the physiological state where students are impacted by the perceived and interpreted reactions to psychological and emotional responses. An example of how

this study corroborated the physiological state and its impact on self-efficacy are how Chanelle's self-esteem grew as she was the friend in the classroom that others felt they could come to for advice (Chanelle, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Being asked for advice built her self-esteem even if it was a perceived emotional belief but this increase in self-esteem carried over into how she believed in herself which not only impacted her personal identity but transferred over into her academic perseverance which was helping her to set goals for her future. The experiences shared in this case study suggested both Bandura's (1977) SCT and the explanations of this theory using self-efficacy as outlined by Pajares (2002).

The participants' experiences in this case study corroborated Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978). Vygotsky (1978) believed students learn through collaboration with other students which would thus create meaning and focus on building problem-solving strategies. The girls in this study created a family community where they could collaborate with one another without the boys being present. The girls in this school community encouraged and celebrated one another as they worked together to increase their perceptions of self and academics as well as their self-efficacy both in their classrooms and for their futures.

Empirical Literature

In relation to the empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two, the findings corroborated the experiences of the girls, their parents, and their teachers and principal in the case study. The sub-categories will be utilized to guide the reader through the empirical literature and the contribution from the study to confirm the literature and share any ways in which the study diverged from the literature or extended the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The sub-categories about single-gender education included boys versus girls, boys, girls, perception of

self, age/grade levels, low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, and the integration of girls, early elementary grade levels, and low-socioeconomic neighborhoods.

Boys versus girls. Within the empirical literature, the theme of boys versus girls revealed how they learn differently based upon brain make-up, and thus instructional strategies vary between the two groups (Rex & Chadwell, 2009). In this study, specific instructional strategies between boys and girls were not mentioned by the participants. Several of the teachers and principal participants mentioned the academic piece being equitable between the genders but the strategies being different. The main impact participants shared was how boys being out of the room impacted their academic perseverance. Chanelle (personal communication, October 10, 2016) felt more comfortable and willing to try without boys in the room. Two girls shared how they could focus and concentrate on their academics because the boys were not making noises and “bugging them” (Lola & Sarah, personal communication, October 12, 2016). The participants agreed with McTaggart (2009) and Zwemuller (2012) who believed boys and girls learn differently and single-gender classrooms give the students an opportunity from a young age to explore their interests and abilities without the other gender present. Bonomo (2010) and Sullivan (2009) explained students in single-gender classrooms had higher academic self-perceptions due to both the instructional strategies along with the brain structure. The teachers at Hopkins Elementary shared how they implemented various strategies such as turn and talk, group work, and even classroom environment strategies such as bright colors to meet the needs of their girls. The girls in this case study shared their experiences describing their academic perseverance in work ethic and willingness to try. The teachers gave examples of girls who were shy and scared to raise their hand at the beginning and by the end were coming up to the board to answer questions even if they were not right because they were willing to try. Bonomo (2010)

and Smith, et al. (2014) shared how young boys and girls could begin preparing for their futures and careers based upon the opportunities presented to them. The case study at Hopkins Elementary indicated each of the girls had not only by second grade figured out their future career but by fifth grade knew the career, where they would go to college, and where they would live once they graduated. By being in a single-gender classroom, the girls were given the opportunity to discuss and create goals for their future without being concerned about what the boys would think or the boys stepping up and saying that is a boy's job.

Boys. Within the literature I reviewed, the majority was based on only boys and boys at the high school level and with African-American boys (Mitchell & Stewart, 2013). Malik and Mirza (2014) and Piechura-Couture et al. (2013) explained the impact the single-gender classrooms and strategies were having on the boys. The focus of this case study was on girls at the elementary level which diverged from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. All participants at Hopkins Elementary acknowledged that the benefits far outweighed the drawbacks of single-gender early elementary classrooms for girls in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods.

Girls. A major difference noted by researchers was the difference in academic strengths and weaknesses between boys and girls (Ross et al., 2012). Multiple researchers explained how girls are not as academically prepared when it comes to mathematics and science as their male counterparts (Brown & Ronau, 2012; Ross et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2014; & Tambo et al., 2011). Tambo et al. (2011) noted the importance of teaching the girls mathematics and science in a setting where it is just girls would give them the opportunity for better results. The participants at Hopkins Elementary agreed how mathematics and science are considered boy subjects, but at Hopkins, the girls have taken what is typically considered an academic weakness

and turned it into a strength. Lola and Lola's mother (personal communication, October 6-13, 2016) expressed how science was a weakness for Lola in her early elementary years, but through single-gender classrooms, she began to love science. They shared an example of how Lola and two other girls grew in their science skills to the point of not just participating in the science fair but helping bring Hopkins Elementary their first science fair win at the county level. Many of the girls discussed how they were intelligent and smart when it came to academics. Sasha (personal communication, October 6, 2016) noted, "If you are struggling in a certain subject, you can let it out" when you are with all girls because if you are with boys they, "think you don't know anything." The teachers corroborated this finding by explaining how the girls are more open, break out of their shells, and are willing to jump in and try when the boys are not there. Mr. Grayhawk (personal communication, October 6, 2016) shared how "for lack of a better word the competition with the boys is not there." The self-efficacy described by researchers in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two was confirmed through the examples and experiences in the single-gender, early elementary classrooms in Hopkins Elementary (Ross et al., 2012 & Huang, 2013).

In addition to academics, this study agrees with Belfi et al. (2012) and Hart (2015) found that the experiences of students in single-gender classrooms also impacted their perceptions of self. The girls who participated in this study felt they could be themselves instead of having to fulfill expectations of the boys in co-educational rooms. All participants agreed on the community within the single-gender classrooms were not just learning communities but families where they belonged and worked together and looked out for one another. This family community matched the research by Belfi et al. (2012) indicating the girls in single-gender classrooms perceived they belonged and were accepted. Dentith (2008) also supported the

notion that both self-efficacy and self-perception are enhanced in single-gender classrooms. In this research, the girls verbalized and shared in their written acrostics their personal identities and the growth of these identities across the years since being in single-gender early elementary classrooms. The girls revealed strong character traits such as unique, hard-working, and intelligent to share how they see themselves. This self-efficacy through perceptions of self-confirms the research reviewed (Dentith, 2008; Aikman & Rao, 2012; & Hart, 2015). This case study shows an extension of the research reviewed in Chapter Two by focusing on elementary-level girls. The majority of the single-gender classrooms for girls researched were focused on middle and high school students and specifically in mathematics and science (Eisele et al., 2009; Patterson & Pihlke, 2011; Schneewi & Zweimuller, 2012; Earlsan & Ranikin, 2013; Elmor & Oyseran, 2012; & Hart, 2015).

Perception of self. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two indicated how single-gender classrooms impacted the self-perceptions of girls. However, Eisele et al. (2009) noted the studies related to the self-perceptions in single-gender classrooms were limited. This study indicates an addition to the literature as the participants expressed their beliefs that the single-gender early elementary classrooms impacted the girls' perceptions of self, especially in the areas of confidence, self-esteem, and expressing themselves in their own words. Dentith (2008) focused on high school students who were academically strong and hard-working but yet lacked self-confidence. Cvencek et al. (2011) agreed and noted how students as early as first grade would share their weaknesses in mathematics and science. The research echoed these stereotypes beginning at early ages for girls which in turn shaped their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988; Hart, 2014; & Osmanaga, 2014). This case study indicated additional research on single-gender programs and classrooms and provided girls' own words to detail how single-gender

early elementary classrooms impacted their self-perceptions and thus self-efficacy. Before this study, the vast majority of studies on single-gender classrooms were quantitative in nature. By providing qualitative data, the girls in the study along with their parents and teachers are having their own voices heard on the topic. In their words, these young fourth and fifth-grade girls spoke of increased confidence and self-esteem. They referred to themselves as strong, hard-workers, unique, smart, encouragers who were and could go far not just academically but socially as well. These girls from an early age were confident in who they were currently and who they would become in the future. The girls in the study all expressed that not only had they discussed the future, but they had set goals and planned it out because they were confident in what they could do. The parents and teachers reiterated their beliefs in the girls being able to reach these goals they had set. The teachers such as Ms. McKinney (personal communication, October 12, 2016) referred to the increase in confidence and self-esteem and the impact it would have on helping them with what they are currently facing or will face in the future. Ms. Batson (personal communication, October 12, 2016) shared how the perceptions of self the girls were gaining she believed “is going to help break the generational poverty that we see with this school.”

Tiechnor, et al. (2012) noted the perceptions of students through the eyes of their parents. This study suggests the findings of Tiechnor, et al. (2012) in that the parents believe single-gender classrooms have increased their girls’ self-esteem and confidence thus increasing their perception of self or personal identity. Additionally, Tiechnor, et al. (2012) mentioned the need for further research incorporating the parents of students in single-gender classrooms. The parent participants in the case study at Hopkins Elementary provided additional data to both the current study and extended research on single-gender classrooms in the United States.

Researchers, Chan et al. (2011) and Spearman and Wade (2013), noted how it is hard to change self-perceptions once students are in the middle and high school. They shared the importance environments have upon the perceptions both positively and negatively on the students in them. The study at Hopkins Elementary suggests an extension of their research by understanding and describing the experiences of the girls at an early age and the impacts the single-gender environment has upon them. The girls described how they were confident and could be themselves and continue to grow due to the impact of the single-gender early elementary classrooms. Their teachers and parents described these perceptions of self and how they believed they were now ingrained in them, part of who they are, and would continue to be the foundation upon which they would continue to grow throughout their school years and in their futures. This supports the research by Spearman and Wade (2013) that states how building positive perceptions at the early ages is of the utmost importance.

Age/grade levels. In the current case study on single-gender early elementary classrooms of girls at Hopkins Elementary, I focused on kindergarten through second-grade classrooms. This extends the research base on single-gender programs as the majority of literature reviewed was based upon single-gender programs at the middle and high school levels (Malik & Mirza, 2014). The findings from this case study replicate Malik and Mirza (2014) who stated that “patterns established at this stage [early years] have far-reaching implications for the future life” and “during these [early] years that children realize their identity and their relationship to the external world” (p. 2). The girls in Hopkins Elementary single-gender early elementary classrooms have created their own perceptions of self and perceptions of academics which in turn has helped them to create not just hopes for their futures but goals and plans for their futures, beginning with middle and high school, to college, to careers, and to where they

will live. The perceptions noted by the participants also corroborates the findings of Lee and Otaiba (2015) that found that for students in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods gender interacts with perceptions even before second grade. Ms. Fletcher (personal communication, October 12, 2016) confirmed this as she noted her second-grade girls in the low-socioeconomic neighborhood that surround Hopkins Elementary have already begun building their personal identities and academic perceptions which aided them in creating goals for their futures.

In Chapter Two, I noted further research was needed in the early elementary years as well. Therefore, this study at Hopkins Elementary adds to the current research by providing an additional study at the early-elementary level. This study is unique in that it provided the opportunity for girls at the early-elementary level the opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words through the qualitative nature of the study. By utilizing the parents and teachers as additional participants, the girls' voices were affirmed.

Low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. Researchers Erarsland and Rrankin (2013), Joo (2010), Kohlass, et al. (2010), and Lee and Bierman (2015) studied numerous students in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods but most were with middle and high school students. The researchers revealed the impact of these low-socioeconomic neighborhoods upon the students in them but specifically the attitudes of the girls in them. The studies suggested a connection between low-socioeconomic neighborhoods and the academic and self-perceptions of the students that live in them. However, these studies indicated a focus on high school girls and the attitudes and beliefs that had been instilled from their families and in co-educational classrooms. Navarre (2014) added that student gains in mathematics were higher within a single-gender program for those students that were minorities and from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. The current study indicated the girls, all from a low-socioeconomic neighborhood and seven of

eight being minorities, had both academic and personal gains from being in the single-gender classroom. This study, additionally, suggested the research by Joo (2010) and Lee and Bierman (2015) that girls in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods need to develop positive self-efficacy towards academics and themselves at an early age. The girls shared the experiences they had starting as early as kindergarten and how those experience impacted how they perceived themselves with regards to confidence and self-esteem, their academic perceptions in regards to increased work ethic and willingness to try, and their bright futures in regards to college, career, and where they will live. This study indicated a correlation between the studies of Joo (2010), Kohlass, et al. (2010), and Lee and Bierman (2015) suggesting the importance of the impact amongst students in developing positive attitudes and values towards education and self from an early age to prepare the girls for their futures.

Mihladiz, et al. (2011) noted “no study looking at the effects of gender, grade level, and monthly income on the attitude towards science” (p. 2583) had been located. Hence, the current study at Hopkins Elementary suggested data support this gap within the literature as it ties together early elementary grade levels, girls, and the low-socioeconomic status of the girls with their attitudes towards science, in addition to other academic areas. The girls in this study shared their increase in science skills as evidence by Lola winning the science fair and Sasha making all A’s in science along with Shay who loves science and wants to continue with science by becoming a veterinarian in the future (Lola, Sasha, & Shay, personal communication, October 4-13, 2016).

Jones and Presler-Marshall (2012), Piechura-Courutre, et al. (2013), and Schneeweis and Zweimuller (2012) found that females, specifically African-American females responded to their school environments and specifically to single-gender environments. The current study indicated

an extension of this research by showing how the four African-American girls along, with the two Hispanic girls, and one Caucasian girl reacted favorably to the single-gender early elementary classrooms. In particular, the girls shared, as their parents and teachers corroborated, how the single-gender classrooms were providing a voice to each of them. This voice revealed their perceptions of academics and self which in turn may, as Jones and Presler-Marshall (2012) shared, help to reduce and/or eradicate poverty they are living within. Ms. Batson (personal communication, October 12, 2016) shared her belief of these values being instilled at an early age should help to stop the generational poverty in which these students live. The girls voiced their futures which involved careers not jobs and included moving outside of their Hopkins

Elementary community into larger cities where they could have more opportunities to grow. Girls in Early Elementary Grade Levels from Low-socioeconomic

Neighborhoods. The Hopkins Elementary study indicated an addition to the limited literature focused on how gender, socio-economic status, and elementary level students intertwine. The majority of the studies reviewed focused on the variables separately. However, Kohlass, et al. (2010) combined the variables of gender, ethnicity, and poverty and found how all three variables impacted science scores individually but the most significant impact came when the three variables intertwined. The participants in this study revealed in their own words how these variables all intertwined with single-gender classrooms to promote positive perceptions of academics and self which impact the girls' school years and their future.

Many studies suggested the need for further research on how to eliminate the generational poverty that often exists in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods (Bratter & Kimbro, 2013; Goodkind, 2013; Joo, 2010; & Kohlass, et al., 2010). Multiple variables, including girls from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods in single-gender early elementary classrooms, were

focused on in the Hopkins Elementary study. The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences these girls had and the impact of these experiences on their academics, self, and future. By utilizing the qualitative case study, the girls, their parents, and their teachers and principal were able to verbalize the strong foundation that the single-gender early elementary classrooms have had on each of them.

Implications

The findings of this case study have multiple implications for the students, parents, teachers/administration, and community stakeholders. The empirical, theoretical, and practical applications of the data analysis have assisted in reducing the gap in research focusing on single-gender classrooms at the early-elementary level with girls from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods.

Theoretical

The main idea of Bandura's (1977) SCT explained by Pajares (2002) regarding self-efficacy supported the experiences which the girls, their parents and their teachers and principal had in the single-gender early elementary classrooms. Bandura's (1977) theory explained how the girls' perceptions were impacted by their observations of others along with the single-gender environment. Thus, the girls' perceptions evolved from the "personal, behavioral, and environmental influences" of the single-gender early elementary classrooms they have been in since kindergarten (Pajares, 2002, para. 2). The evidence implies that the girls grew within the single-gender environment in ways that they would not have without the support of this specific environment. If there had been boys within their classrooms, the girls noted they would not have been as willing to try academically which in turn not only increased their academics but their personal work ethic and their confidence and self-esteem. The perceptions that grew within each

girl started with the external single-gender environment as an influence but then turned into internal influences which would impact them. Additionally, the girls not only grew in their perceptions from those around them but they will be able to help others to grow as well as they continue their journey (Vygotsky, 1978). An example of this impact was noted as previous single-gender girls are now the president and vice-president of their middle school student governments thus allowing them to help others grow. In an environment such as this, students are going to be impacted either negatively or positively. This current study suggested the impact was positive for the girls both now and for their future. This impact created a foundation for these girls and girls that will enter into these classrooms in the future.

Empirical

The empirical research indicated the various variables of this study in separate cases from gender to grade levels to different socio-economic statuses all in relation to single-gender classrooms. The previous literature showed data primarily focusing on males, African-Americans, and middle and high school students. However, this case study indicated an addition to the empirical literature in several ways that previous literature had been limited. The first addition to the empirical literature was based upon the case study being qualitative. Although the focus of the case study was only on one school in South Carolina, it provided thick, rich data in the words of the girls, their parents, and their teachers and principal. While quantitative data are important, some data simply cannot be compiled numerically. Hearing the stories and experiences from the participants themselves and in their own words, researchers and other stakeholders have the opportunity to “see” the results of the case. Secondly, the voices of elementary aged students which had limited voice in previously studied literature were added. Giving a voice to all ages of participants not only adds to literature but extends the data in

relation to participants of all ages and their vast viewpoints. And lastly, as the study suggested data support the variables intertwined together versus individual accounts. As previous literature noted individual accounts of variables all giving invaluable data to add to the study of single-gender classrooms, few intertwined the variables. Hence, the intertwined variables within this study not only provided additional data to the topic of single-gender classroom environments but provided stronger piece of data where the variables met.

Practical

Practical implications can be made for the students, families, teachers, and principal at Hopkins Elementary and in other single-gender classrooms after reviewing the data presented in the case study. For students and their families the practical implications of this study begins with the fact that the girls have grown in their perceptions of education and themselves and thus they will be impacted due to these perceptions. The girls have found themselves, their confidence, and their self-esteem. Due to these positive perceptions of themselves, the girls will be able to use this foundation as they continue to grow. Their perceptions of academics including their work ethic and their willingness to try will aid them in growing academically both now and throughout their school careers including college. This growth could aid them in obtaining scholarships to help get them into college as most of their families will not have the funds to send them without financial support. For these students, they could be the first in their families to attend college because of the solid foundation they received in their single-gender early elementary classrooms regarding perceptions of academics and themselves. The potential for the students is endless and could end the generational poverty they currently live within.

For teachers and administrators within single-gender programs, the implications are vast. The growth the girls have shown, in relation to their perceptions of academics and themselves,

impacts the grades and the futures of the girls, the teachers, and the administrators. The impact of the girls' growth provides support for teachers and administrators to continue the program as it is currently or to enlarge the program by offering more single-gender classrooms at each grade level. By adding more single-gender classrooms more students will have the opportunity to experience and be impacted by the single-gender environment and thus impact their futures in the same way the girls in this study have been impacted.

Additionally, the school is one of the few offering single-gender education especially at the early elementary grade levels in the county and state. Therefore, Hopkins Elementary could become a model single-gender program for other schools to visit and gain invaluable information. This in turn could create the possibility of other schools and/or districts to implement a single-gender program for their students. With the growth of programs across the county and/or state, the possibilities of professional development and additional support for the teachers of single-gender programs could grow as well. .

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations of the study are set boundaries created by the researcher (Joyner et al., 2013). In this case study the delimitations set forth included limiting the study to one local elementary school located in South Carolina, its students, parents, teachers, and principal. The student participants were limited to students who had been in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten and were current fourth or fifth graders. The number of students having been in single-gender classrooms every year from kindergarten to fourth or fifth grade was limited. Therefore, the possible student participant pool was limited, and it ultimately limited the number of student participants. The parent participants were the guardians of the students in the study.

Teacher participants were limited to those teachers at Hopkins Elementary who had taught single-gender girl classrooms.

Limitations are parameters that could impact the study and results (Joyner et al., 2013). The limitations in this case study included that the case was limited to one elementary school which has a single-gender program from kindergarten to fifth grade for girls and boys along with the students, parents, teachers, and principal connected to it. These limitations could impact the transferability of the study. The study included a total of 21 participants (seven students, seven parents, and seven teachers/principal). Due to the transient nature of the school, only 14 students met the criteria to participate in the study. Of those, two moved during participant recruitment and five did not choose to participate in the study. Student participants' ages of nine to 11 did show some limitations on the ability to fully express their ideas verbally as did the developmental levels of the different students. Some of the students were able to clearly explain and describe their experiences while others needed simpler questions and would give short, simplistic answers instead of in-depth descriptions. The students were able to share via written prompts and acrostic poems as well. Due to the nature of a case study and the closeness of the researcher to the participants both during the study and being a previous teacher of the student participant, bracketing out personal experiences by the researcher to protect and validate data collected.

Recommendations for Future Research

This case study showed data which added to the literature on single-gender education classrooms for girls at the early elementary school level in a low-socioeconomic neighborhood. Since this study was focused on one school that fit this criteria, further research would be beneficial to other elementary schools within low-socioeconomic neighborhoods that offer

single-gender programs starting in the early elementary years. Further research would add to the transferability and generalizability of the findings of this study. Further research is also needed on the early elementary level single-gender programs, regardless of socio-economic level.

An additional suggestion for future research longitudinally is to study the students that have been within single-gender classrooms since kindergarten. This longitudinal study could follow two paths. First, it could study the transition of these students from single-gender classrooms back into co-educational classrooms in middle and high school. Secondly, it could continue to follow the students through college and/or careers to see if the generational poverty cycle that some of the participants spoke of is continuing or not.

Finally, further findings indicated how single-gender classrooms impacted both perceptions of self and academics in the single-gender early elementary classrooms. However, the actual academic data were hard to track due to the transient nature of the school and that only one core group of students continued through each level. The academic findings were more general in improving work ethic, improving mathematics and science, and willingness to try versus specifically meeting certain numerical grades of levels on standardized testing. Therefore, further studies on the academics of the program with an emphasis on following individual students and the core group only would provide further information on the academic benefits of single-gender early elementary classrooms.

Summary

The purpose of this single case study was to describe the experiences of girls in single-gender, early elementary classrooms (kindergarten through second), their parents, their teachers, and their principal, from low-socioeconomic backgrounds at Hopkins Elementary School (pseudonym) about their perceptions of education and self. This case study showed thick, rich

data from the participants through the descriptions of their stories and experiences. These experiences help to close the gap in the literature on single-gender programs at the early elementary level and with girls. This study was guided by the central research question: How do single-gender early elementary classrooms impact the perceptions of girls from a low-socioeconomic neighborhood in South Carolina toward education and themselves? The sub-questions focused upon the experiences of the students, the impact on the girls' perceptions of self, the impact on the girls' perceptions of academics, and the impact on the girls' future plans. Four themes evolved from the data collected. The themes in order of research question correlation included community, personal identity, academic perseverance, and bright futures.

Results of the study indicated that students within single-gender early elementary classrooms had experiences which provided them with not simply a community of learners but a family atmosphere where they could grow and learn socially, personally, and academically while at the same time not just thinking about the future but setting goals for college, careers, and after. The students, parents and teachers/principal acknowledged the impact that these communities of families were strengthened due to the fact they were indeed single gender without boys. The only questionable drawback of the single-gender early elementary classroom was the reintegration of the girls into co-educational settings in middle school. However, all participants noted the strong personal identities that have grown from being within the classes and how these identities and foundation should be ingrained into who they are and will carry them into the integration as strong, confident girls with good self-esteem. The participants reiterated the impact of the single-gender early elementary classrooms on the growth within the girls personally with a strong emphasis on increased confidence and self-esteem. Further, the classrooms impacted not just academics in the way of grades but impacted the foundation of

getting better grades. The participants shared how the students had increased their work ethic and due to the family atmosphere were willing to take risks that otherwise they might not have. Additionally, the girls increased their understanding and application of mathematics and science since the boys were not there to take over in those academic areas which they normally take the lead. Finally, the results showed the students were not okay with the status quo and continuing in the footsteps of their parents of which many did not graduate high school or go to college. They already had goals set, plans made. The students knew their future careers, where they would go to college and why and where they would live once they graduated to have the career of their choice. The takeaway from this study is that single-gender early elementary classrooms at Hopkins Elementary did impact the girls in them. The findings suggested the experiences of the girls were impacted positively and although no one knows if these impacts will continue throughout their schooling and future, the foundation has been set, and the goals have been created.

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APPENDIX A

SINGLE GENDER IN SC 2014-2015



Office of School Transformation

12/02/2014

SC Single Gender Options 2014-2015 School Year

School District	School/Site	Level(s) Offered
Beaufort	Hilton Head Elementary	4th and 5th Grades
Charleston	Morningside Middle	6th-8th Grades
Darlington	Hartsville Middle	6th-8th Grades
Darlington	North Hartsville Elementary	2nd-4th Grades
Dorchester 2	Newington Elementary	2nd Grade girls
Dorchester 2	Summerville Elementary	1st-3rd grades girls
Florence 2	Hannah-Pamplico Middle	6th-8th Grades
Greenville	Cherrydale Elementary	3rd-5th Grades
		Kindergarten-5th Grades
		9th Grade Physical Education
Horry	Academy of Hope	1st & 2nd grade Math & Science
Lancaster	A.R. Rucker Middle	6th-7th Grades and all Physical Education
Lancaster	North Elementary	4th grade and 5th Grade girls
Lexington 2	Pine Ridge Middle	6th & 7th Grade
Lexington 5	Crossroads Middle	6th Grade
Marion 7	Creek Bridge Middle/High	6th-9th Grades, one 11th grade boy class
Oconee	Seneca Middle	6th-8th Grades Advisory and Physical Education
Richland 1	Hamd Middle	6th-8th Grades
Richland 2	Deat Middle	6th-8th Grades (Magnet)
Richland 2	L. W. Conder Elementary	1st - 5th Grades
Richland 2	Sandlapper Elementary	2nd-5th Grades
SC PCSD	Spartanburg Preparatory School	Entirely SG; 5k - 8th
Spartanburg 2	James H. Hendrix Elementary	3rd Grade
Spartanburg 2	Boiling Springs Intermediate	4th and 5th Grades
York 3	Belleview Elementary	3rd
York 3	India Hook Elementary	5th Grade

APPENDIX B

CHILD ASSENT FORM

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
9/29/2016 to 9/28/2017
Protocol # 2634.092916

Assent of Child to Participate in a Research Study

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?

THE INFLUENCE A SINGLE-GENDER, EARLY-CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM HAS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF
GIRLS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS TOWARDS EDUCATION AND THEMSELVES

Brandi B. Massey

Why are we doing this study?

We are interested in studying girls who have been in all-girl classes since kindergarten.

Why are we asking you to be in this study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because you have been in single-gender (all-girl) classes since kindergarten.

If you agree, what will happen?

If you are in this study you will answer questions (interview) with Mrs. Massey two times, talk with your classmates (focus group), and write/draw about what it is like in a class of all girls. All interviews and focus groups will be recorded.

Do you have to be in this study?

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

Do you have any questions?

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

Signature of Child

Date

Brandi B. Massey

Dr. Constance Pearson, Chair, Liberty University
cpearson@liberty.edu

Liberty University Institutional Review Board,
1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515
or email at irb@liberty.edu.

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT PARTICIPANTS

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9/29/2016 to 9/28/2017
Protocol # 2634.092916

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT PARTICIPANTS

THE INFLUENCE A SINGLE GENDER EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM HAS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF GIRLS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS TOWARDS EDUCATION AND THEMSELVES

Brandi B. Massey

Liberty University

School of Education

You and your child are invited to be in a research study of *single-gender education*. You and your child were selected as possible participants because you are the parent of a daughter who has been involved in single-gender education classes since kindergarten. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Brandi B. Massey, doctoral candidate in the *School of Education* at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of girls in single-gender, early-childhood classrooms (grades k5-2nd) in relation to their perceptions of education and themselves.

Procedures:

If you and your child agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

Parents:

- 1.) Complete a 10-minute survey/questionnaire
- 2.) Participate in one interview (30 minutes to 1 hour), which will be audio recorded

Students:

- 1.) Participate in two 20-30 minute interviews, which will be audio recorded.
- 2.) Participate in one 30-minute focus group with their classmates, which will be audio recorded.
- 3.) Respond to a written prompt that will take approximately 10-15 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks involved in this study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits of participation are that the data could help the school and/or district in making decisions regarding continuing single gender programs. There are no direct benefits to the participants.

Compensation:

You will receive no compensation for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and the transcriptionist will have access to the records. The transcriptionist will only have access to the interviews and focus groups that he/she transcribes. School and individual identities will remain strictly confidential. The only limitation to confidentiality is that the researcher cannot assure participants of focus groups that other participants of the group will maintain their confidentiality and privacy. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym for reporting information so

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Protocol # 2634.092916

that your name and your child's name will not be shared. Data will be recorded and reported through shared stories but not with names attached. Data will be stored on an external hard drive at the researcher's home. All recordings will be maintained by the researcher. However, a hired transcriptionist will be used to transcribe the interviews and focus groups. Research records will be kept for the mandated three-year window. Then, paper records will be destroyed by shredding and electronic files will be deleted and wiped clean.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or *County Schools*. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is *Brandi B. Massey*. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at _____ You may also contact the research's faculty advisor, Dr. Constance Pearson, at cpearson@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me and my child as part of our participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER/PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANTS

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9/29/2016 to 9/28/2017
Protocol # 2634.092916

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANTS

THE INFLUENCE A SINGLE GENDER EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM HAS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF GIRLS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS TOWARDS EDUCATION AND THEMSELVES

Brandi B. Massey

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of *single-gender education*. You were selected as a possible participant because you have taught or are teaching single-gender education classes or are the principal of a school that offers single-gender classes. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Brandi B. Massey, doctoral candidate in the *School of Education* at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is *to describe the experiences of girls in single-gender, early-childhood classrooms (grades k-3rd) in relation to their perceptions of education and themselves.*

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- 1.) *Participate in one focus group (30 minutes to 1 hour), which will be audio recorded (teachers only)*
- 2.) *Participate in one interview (30 minutes to 1 hour), which will be audio recorded*

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks involved in this study *are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.*

The benefits of participation are *that the data could help the school and/or district in making decisions regarding continuing single gender programs. There are no direct benefits to the participants.*

Compensation:

You will receive *no compensation* for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher and the transcriptionist will have access to the records. The transcriptionist will only have access to the interviews and focus groups that he/she transcribes. School and individual identities will remain strictly confidential. The only limitation to confidentiality is that the researcher cannot assure participants of focus groups that other participants of the group will maintain their confidentiality and privacy. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym for reporting information so that names will not be shared. Data will be recorded and reported through shared stories but not with names attached. Data will be stored on an external hard drive at the researcher's home. All recordings will be maintained by the researcher. However, a hired transcriptionist will be used to transcribe the interviews and focus groups. Research records will be kept for the mandated three-year window. Then, paper records will be destroyed by shredding, and electronic files will be deleted and wiped clean.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
9/29/2016 to 9/28/2017
Protocol # 2634.092916

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University *or* *County Schools*. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is *Brandi B. Massey*. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at _____ You may also contact the research's faculty advisor, Dr. Constance Pearson, at cpearson@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

COUNTY APPROVAL

Department of Accountability and Quality Assurance

August 24, 2016

Ms. Brandi Massey

SUBJECT: THE IMPACT A SINGLE-GENDER EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM HAS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF GIRLS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS TOWARDS EDUCATION AND THEMSELVES

Dear Ms. Massey:

County Schools' Research Committee reviewed the research proposal entitled "*The Impact a Single-Gender Early Childhood Classroom has on the Perceptions of Girls from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds towards Education and Themselves.*" **District approval for this study has been granted.** The approval period for this study is in effect for a minimum of one (1) year from the date of this missive. Research may only be conducted within County Schools as identified in the approved research and data sharing agreement. You are reminded that the approved research design and procedures are to be followed. NO change in protocol is allowed without prior written approval from the District.

The Director of Accountability and Quality Assurance may withdraw District approval at any time and for any reason. If approval is terminated, all research and accompanying activities involving the District and/or the external agency will cease in County Schools. Lastly, by conducting research in you agree to follow all federal regulations for privacy and protection; District research guidelines; and District professional conduct policies. All information, including student, teacher, school, and District names, will remain confidential and anonymous when publicly reporting. Again, violation of the statement of agreement will be considered a breach of contract.

A final copy of the report is requested by County Schools.

Sincerely,

Director of Accountability & Quality Assurance

APPENDIX F

SITE APPROVAL



9/10/2016

Re: Site approval

 Reply all |  Delete |  Junk | 



Re: Site approval

 Today, 10:21 AM
 Massey, Brandi 

 Reply all | 

Inbox

Mrs. Massey

You have my permission to conduct the study at [redacted] study in the future.

[redacted]. I look forward to receiving the findings from your

Serving in Education,

Principal

From: Massey, Brandi <byes, you have permission to conduct the study at [redacted]>
 Sent: Saturday, September 10, 2016 10:07 AM
 To: [redacted]
 Subject: Site approval

SITE PERMISSION –

Date: September 7, 2016

Dear Mr.

As a graduate student at Liberty University in the School of Education, I am conducting research as a part of the requirements for a doctorate in curriculum and instruction. The title of my research study is Single-gender Early Childhood Classrooms Have Exceptional Impacts on the Perceptions of Girls from Low-Socioeconomic Backgrounds. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of girls in single-gender, early childhood classrooms (kindergarten through second) in relation to their perceptions of education and themselves. A deeper description and/or understanding of students, their parents, teachers, and administrators could provide beneficial feedback to both current single-gender schools and schools potentially looking to implement single-gender classes.

I am writing to request permission to conduct my research at [redacted]. Potential student participants (fourth and fifth grade girls that have been in single-gender classrooms since kindergarten), parent participants (the parents of the student participants), single-gender girl teachers, and the principal will receive a brief introductory letter from me seeking participation in the study. Student participants will then be asked to be a part of a focus group, individual interviews, and a written activity to describe their own personal experiences of a single-gender environment. Parental

9/10/2016

Re: Site approval

participants will be asked to complete a demographic survey and an individual interview about their daughter's single-gender experience. Teacher participants will participate in individual interviews and a focus group to describe their experiences. The principal participant will participate in an interview. Participants will sign an informed consent and assent prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to withdraw at any time. All interviews, focus groups, and surveys will take place before or after school hours.

Thank you for considering allowing this research at your school. If you choose to grant permission, please send me an email at _____ stating that you are granting permission for me to contact student, parent, and teacher participants along with your school's name, your name, and date.

Sincerely,

Brandi Massey
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

APPENDIX G**LETTER REQUESTING PARENT AND STUDENT PARTICIPANTS**

September 2016

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Brandi Massey, and I am a second-grade teacher at . I am currently working on my Doctorate in Instruction and Curriculum through Liberty University. I am recruiting parents and their daughters to volunteer as participants in my study entitled **THE IMPACT A SINGLE-GENDER EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM HAS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF GIRLS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS TOWARDS EDUCATION AND THEMSELVES.**

For your daughter to qualify as a participant, she must meet the criteria below:

1. A female student, currently in the 4th or 5th grade.
2. Has been in all girl (single-gender) classes since kindergarten.

For you to qualify as a volunteer participant, you must be the parent of a daughter who meets the above criteria.

If you choose to allow your child to participate, she will be asked to complete two, 20-30 minute interviews with myself, one 20-30 minute focus group with other girls in the study (all from her current school), and respond to a written prompt. Interviews and focus groups would be right before or after school.

If you volunteer to participate, you will be asked to complete one, 30 minute interview with myself and one 10 minute survey. The interviews will be right before or after school hours.

All interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded. All information gathered will be kept confidential, and names will not be used. You and your child may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study. If you would like to volunteer, contact the researcher using one of the methods below. I will respond/send home a consent form for you and your child to sign. I will call you to arrange for interview dates and times.

Sincerely,

Brandi B. Massey

APPENDIX H**E-MAIL REQUESTING TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANTS**

September 2016

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, I am working on my Doctorate in Instruction and Curriculum through Liberty University. I am currently recruiting volunteer participants for my study entitled **THE IMPACT A SINGLE-GENDER EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM HAS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF GIRLS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS TOWARDS EDUCATION AND THEMSELVES.**

To qualify as a volunteer participant, you need to meet one of the criteria below.

1. You are either the principal or assistant principal at a school that offers single-gender education classes in the early childhood years (K5-2nd grade).
2. You are currently or at one time have taught single-gender education classes of girls.

If you volunteer to participate, teachers would be requested to participate in one 30 minute, one-on-one interview with myself and one 30 minute focus group with your colleagues who teach or have taught single-gender girl classes. Principal/assistant principal participants would only participate in the one-on-one interview. All interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded. All information gathered will be kept confidential, and your name will not be used.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate. If you would like to volunteer, please respond to this email by 10/3/2016, and I will send to you the consent forms to sign and will arrange for interview/focus groups dates and times.

Sincerely,

Brandi B. Massey

APPENDIX I**IRB RESEARCH APPROVAL****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 29, 2016

Brandi B. Massey

IRB Approval 2634.092916: The Impact a Single-Gender, Early-Childhood Classroom Has on the Perceptions of Girls from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds towards Education and Themselves

Dear Brandi B. Massey,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.
Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX J

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Instructions:

The following questions relate to the single-gender classes you have been in. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and be thorough. Please use pseudonyms in the discussion.

Open-Ended Interview Questions

Part 1

1. Tell me about your family? Friends? Neighborhood? School?
2. Describe for me what it was like to be in a single-gender classroom from kindergarten through second grade?
3. Describe for me how being in a single-gender classroom during your early childhood years influenced the way you feel about school today?
4. How did being in a single-gender classroom during this time make you feel? Was it different from third grade to fifth grade? How so?
5. Did you ask to be in single-gender classroom beginning in kindergarten? If so, why?
6. What has been your favorite thing about being in single-gender classrooms? Why? What has been your least favorite part? Why?
7. From kindergarten to second grade, which subjects were your strengths/ which were your weaknesses? Why? As you have moved into third, fourth, and fifth grade are those subjects still your strongest and weakest or have they changed? Why?
8. Describe how you felt about school in kindergarten, first, and second grade?
9. How do you think your experiences in kindergarten through second grade affected how you feel about school today?
10. How did being in a single-gender classroom during this time affect how you felt about school?
11. Would you like to continue in single-gender classrooms into middle school? Why or Why not?

Part 2

12. Describe yourself in a few sentences.
13. Describe how you feel about/see yourself. Have you always felt this way or has it changed? If it changed, when did it change?
14. What adjectives describe you? Are these the same adjectives that would have described you in kindergarten, first, or second grade?
15. What do you love most about yourself from the time that you were in kindergarten until you finished second grade? Is that still the thing you love most? If not, what do you love most now? Why?

16. What are some things you were really good at during your early childhood years? Are you still good at these things now? If not, what do you think has changed? When did these things change? Why?
17. How has single-gender affected how you feel about yourself?
18. Have your parents ever discussed college with you? What about teachers in kindergarten through second grade? What about teachers in third through fifth grade?
19. Do you want to go to college? Why? Where?
20. When was the first time you thought about going to college?
21. What do you want to be when you grow up? Why? Is this the same thing you wanted to do during your kindergarten through second grade years? If not, when did it change and why?
22. Where do you want to live when you grow up? Why? Has this always been the place where you want to live, or has it changed? If it changed, when did it change and why?

APPENDIX K

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY FOR PARENTS

Demographic Survey for Parents

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

What is your age?

- 18 to 24 years
- 25 to 34 years
- 35 to 44 years
- 45 to 54 years
- 55 to 64 years
- Age 65 or older

Please specify your ethnicity.

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other

What is your marital status?

- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

How many children are currently in your household?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, select the highest degree received.

- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctoral degree

Are you currently...?

Please indicate your employment status (check all that apply):

- Employed for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work, not currently looking
- homemaker
- student
- Military
- Retired
- Unable to work

How long have you lived in your current city?

- Less than 6 months
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21+ years

APPENDIX L

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

Instructions:

The following questions relate to your daughter, your family, and the single-gender classes she has been in. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and be thorough. Please use pseudonyms in the discussion.

Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your daughter? Your family? Your neighborhood? The elementary school?
2. What are your educational goals for your daughter?
3. Describe any college discussions you have had with your daughter both prior to single-gender experiences and those after single-gender experiences.
4. What are your overall general goals for your daughter in the coming years in regards to the areas of education, personal and future success, and a career?
5. Has single-gender affected these goals either positively or negatively? If so, how?
6. Describe the single-gender classrooms that your daughter has been a part of since kindergarten.
7. Do you have any other daughters that have not been in a single-gender classroom? If so, describe the differences.
8. Describe the benefits, if any, you believe your daughter has experienced due to the single-gender classroom? Education? Self-esteem? Why?
9. Since being in the single-gender classroom, describe how your daughter's attitude/feelings/beliefs have stayed the same or changed towards school in general? Towards herself (i.e. self-esteem, voice, strength in who she is)?
10. Why do you believe these attitudes/feelings/beliefs have stayed constant or changed?

APPENDIX M

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPAL

Instructions:

The following questions relate to the single-gender classes you teach, have taught, or oversee as principal. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and be thorough. Please use pseudonyms in the discussion.

Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. How long have you taught single-gender classes to young ladies? Which grades? Co-educational classes?
2. Why did you choose to teach a single-gender class of girls or were you told you would be teaching this class?
3. What training did you receive and how does this impact how you teach single-gender classes?
4. Describe your single-gender early childhood classroom and the girls who participated in it.
5. What do you see as the benefits for this type of classroom on the girls in their early childhood years? Elementary years? High school years? In the future? Why do you see these as benefits?
6. What do you see as the drawbacks of this type of classroom on the girls in their early childhood years? Elementary years? High school years? In the future? Why do you see these as drawbacks?
7. Being in a 100% Title I School, how have you seen the program impact the perceptions of education and self, either positively or negatively, in the girls today? In a few years?

APPENDIX N**FOCUS GROUP SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS****Instructions:**

The following questions relate to the single-gender classes you have been in. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and be thorough. Please use pseudonyms in the discussion.

Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. How would you describe to me what it is like to be in a single-gender, girls' class since kindergarten?
2. How was it different in your kindergarten through second grade classes being with girls rather than being in a class with boys? What about third through fifth grades?
3. Which class would you prefer to be in: single-gender girls or co-ed with boys? Why?
4. How did single-gender classrooms in kindergarten through second grade help you with your grades? What about third through fifth grade?
5. How did single-gender classrooms in kindergarten through second grade help your self-esteem? Self-esteem means to have pride in yourself. What about third through fifth grade?
6. What were your future plans in kindergarten through second grade? College? Career? Family? Are they the same now? If not, why did they change?
7. Do you plan to live in Hopkins or move to another city/state when you are an adult? Why? Have you always wanted to live there? Why or why not?

Further questions will be created and/or these questions edited based off of interview responses.

APPENDIX O

FOCUS GROUP SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Instructions:

The following questions relate to the single-gender classes you teach. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and be thorough. Please use pseudonyms in the discussion.

Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. How would you describe the success of a single-gender classroom for girls at Hopkins Elementary School starting in the early elementary years (kindergarten through second grade)? Elementary years (third through fifth grade)? Education? Self-perceptions?
2. Can you describe the differences in the academics and/or self-perceptions of those girls who have been in single-gender since kindergarten versus those who have only been in for a year or two? (Note that only the girls in single-gender classroom since kindergarten are participants in this study. This question is limited so as to gain a deeper understanding of how single-gender impacts the girls across time).
3. How do you think the single-gender environment affects girls in a Title I school versus a non-Title I school? Why?

Further questions will be created and/or these questions edited based off of interview responses.

APPENDIX P

STUDENT WRITING PROMPTS

Please complete the acrostic below:

(Please describe what single-gender classrooms mean to you by choosing a word or phrase that starts with each letter below.)

S _____

I _____

N _____

G _____

L _____

E _____

G _____

E _____

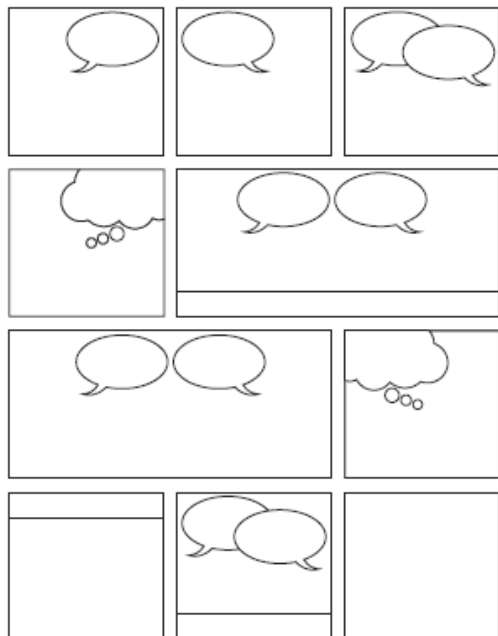
N _____

D _____

E _____

R _____

Please create a comic strip that shows us about your experiences in single-gender classrooms from kindergarten to second grade.



APPENDIX Q

AUDIT TRAIL

Task	Dates
Receive IRB approval	9/30/2016
Request of recruitment participants	9/30/2016 sent to principal
Received lists of recruitment participant possibilities	9/30/2016 received from principal
Emailed potential teacher/principal participants	9/30/2016
Letter for student/parent recruitment sent home via students	9/30/2016
Consent and Assent forms sent to identified participants	Received before or on the date of the interviews (see interviews)
Schedule, conduct, and transcribe interviews and focus groups	Upon receipt of consent forms 10/3/2016-10/23/2016- transcribed as I interviewed
Interview part 1 with Sasha	10/4/2016
Written prompt with Sasha	10/4/2016
Interview part 2 with Sasha	10/6/2016
Transcribed interviews with Sasha	10/4/2016-10/6/2016
Interview with Sasha's mom & survey	10/4/2016
Transcribed interview with Sasha's mom	10/4/2016
Interview with McKinney	10/4/2016
Transcribed interview- McKinney	10/8/2016
Interview with Hadley	10/6/2016
Transcribed interview- Hadley	10/8/2016
Interview with Fletcher	10/5/2016
Transcribed interview -Fletcher	10/8/2016
Interview with Rogers	10/4/2016
Transcribed interview- Rogers	10/8/2016
Interview with Batson	10/6/2016
Transcribed interview -Batson	10/8/2016
Interview with Grayhawk	10/6/2016
Transcribed interview - Grayhawk	10/8/2016
Interview part 1 Chanelle	10/6/2016
Written prompt with Chanelle	10/6/2016
Interview part 2 Chanelle	10/10/2016
Transcribed interview with Chanelle	10/8/2016 – 10/12/2016
Interview with Chanelle's mom & demographic survey	10/6/2016

Transcribed interview with Chanelle's mom	10/8/2016
Interview part 1 Shay	10/7/2016
Written prompt with Shay	10/7/2016
Interview part 2 Shay	10/10/16
Transcribed interview with Shay	10/8/2016-10/12/2016
Interview with Shay's mom & demographic survey	10/7/2016
Interview part 1 Lola	10/6/2016
Written prompt with Lola	10/6/2016
Interview part 2 Lola	10/13/2016
Transcribed interview with Lola	10/8/2016-10/13/2016
Interview with Lola's mom & demographic survey	10/6/2016
Interview part 1 Sarah	10/10/2016
Written prompt with Sarah	10/10/2016
Interview part 2 Sarah	10/13/2016
Transcribed interview with Sarah	10/13/2016
Interview with Sarah's mom & demographic survey	10/10/2016
Transcribed interview with Sarah's mom	10/22/2016
Interview part 1 LaKeisha	10/10/2016
Written prompt with LaKeisha	10/10/2016
Interview part 2 Lakeisha	10/13/2016
Transcribed interview with Lakeisha	10/22/2016
Interview with LaKeisha's mom & demographic survey	10/10/2016
Interview with Miller	10/12/2016
Transcribed interview with Miller	10/23/2016
Focus Group with Teachers	10/12/2016
Transcribe Focus Group with Teachers	10/23/2016
Focus Group with Students	10/12/2016
Transcribe Focus Group with Students	10/23/2016
Interview part 1 with Kassie	10/17/2016
Interview part 2 with Kassie	10/18/2016
Written prompt with Kassie	10/17/2016
Interview with Kassie's mom	Decided not to participate
Demographic survey from Kassie's mom	10/18/2016
Transcribed interview with Kassie	10/23/2016
Input data into Atlas Ti	10/22/2016 - 10/26/2016
Analyzed Data	10/23/2016 - 10/27/2016
Transcripts to Participants for member check	as finished each transcription
Wrote chapters 4 & 5	10/28/2016-11/12/2016

Sent to Chair for review	11/13/2016
Make minor corrections to Chapters 4 and 5	11/13/2016
Sent to committee	11/14/2016
Returned from committee	11/29/2016
Edits made and returned to committee	12/5/2016
Sent to Research Consultant	12/16/2016
Returned from Research Consultant	1/19/2017
Corrections made and resubmitted to Research Consultant	
Defense Date	

APPENDIX S

SAMPLE STUDENT ACROSTIC AND COMIC STRIP

Please complete the acrostic below:

(Please describe what single-gender classrooms mean to you by choosing a word or phrase that starts with each letter below.)

Sisterhood _____

In courage _____

Nice _____

Gets us ready to the next level _____

Let us make new friends _____

Elegant _____

Gets us learn new things _____

Even _____

Never give up, even if you do a mistake _____

Defend _____

Easy _____

Real _____

Single gender
Single gender



APPENDIX T
SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT

Lola's mom
Individual Interview
10/6/16 3:00 pm

The following questions relate to your daughter, your family, and the single-gender classes she has been in.. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and be thorough. Please use pseudonyms in the discussion.

Researcher: Tell me about your daughter?

Mom: Well she's, she's happy. A happy girl. She's a little shy at times. Outspoken when she wants to be and at times very quiet. She's really laid back. And she gives a lot of love. Very caring.

Researcher: Tell me about your family?

Mom: Um two girls and one boy. I live with my husband. Um currently taking care of my father at home and my son (6 months old). They are a handful.

Researcher: Your neighborhood?

Mom: Um, it's a quiet neighborhood. We know each other. Uh, the neighbors we take care of each other so when something is going on we just know.

Researcher: The elementary school?

Mom: It's a nice school overall. I like it. When I first got to the US, obviously I came here to so it's kind of in a way I feel happy that she's, that I was here and now she is here.

Researcher: What are your educational goals for your daughter?

Mom: Well I want her to go to college. I want her to be successful in everything she does. Whatever career she picks or if she doesn't, I want her to be happy with it.

Researcher: Describe any college discussions you have had with your daughter both prior to single-gender experiences and those after single-gender experiences.

Mom: Well right now like since I take her to classes, piano classes, at (local university), she looks at the school and she's like, I like this school and I'm like I've been here for a while and

it's a nice school, do you want to come here? What do you want to be? And she keeps coming back and forth. She says she wants to be a teacher and then a doctor.

Researcher: What are your overall general goals for your daughter in the coming years in regards to the areas of education, personal and future success, and a career?

Mom: I really want her to get the best out of everything. I want her to be successful in everything she does in the future. So she can be happy and um content with whatever the future might bring her.

Researcher: Has single-gender affected these goals either positively or negatively? If so, how?

Mom: I think it has affected her positively because um she has been with the same girls since kindergarten and they have kind of been growing up together. And they pretty much, I know, she's she's how do I want to say this. Some of the girls grow up fast and they still maintain their innocence in some sort of way than when not in single gender.

Researcher: Yes

Mom: They maintain their innocence.

Researcher: Describe the single-gender classrooms that your daughter has been a part of since kindergarten. Just like in general what have you noticed about them.

Mom: Well I notice they pretty much like last year she loved science. She loved the science project and apparently her three friends and her won the science fair that they were doing. So it was kind of amazing because I mean when I was growing up I wanted to be on that. And apparently she got it she did it! So I was very happy for that. And like the teacher said last year the (school) had never won anything like that so it was kind of kind of good that they were smart.

Researcher: It is a good thing.

Researcher: Do you have any other daughters that have not been in a single-gender classroom? If so, describe the differences.

Mom: No. They have all been part of single gender.

Researcher: Describe the benefits, if any, you believe your daughter has experienced due to the single-gender classroom? Education? Self-esteem? Why?

Mom: I think she is in a single gender class she has been more outgoing more herself because she is in the same group. Like they grow up as little sisters so she's more um outgoing and more confident in herself. She's more she's more caring and compassionate due to that too. I am very thankful for that. Kind of glad.

Researcher: Have you seen any benefits academically?

Mom: Yeah she's this year she's gotten all A's and B's. She does, she gets home and does her homework all by herself. She's more enthusiastic about doing her work and getting her a's and b's. And I'm happy that she's doing that.

Researcher: Since being in the single-gender classroom, describe how your daughter's attitude/feelings/beliefs have stayed the same or changed towards school in general? Towards herself (i.e. self-esteem, voice, strength in who she is)?

Mom: They've pretty much stayed the same because she loves school. She gets mad at me if I pick her up early for some reason (laughed). So it's been, for me it's been a beautiful experience for both of them. As far as they loving school, loving to come to school, knowing they have the same friends all the time, um, they are happy girls.

Researcher: How has her self-esteem changed or stayed the same as far as her voice, or who she is? Has it stayed the same or changed?

Mom: I think it has changed in a way that she has become more self-confident. When she started she was very shy. Very, very shy. (laughed) And she's pretty much now she speaks her mind now more, she asks questions more, but it has taken a long time but I know it's due to the single gender. Having a good group of little sisters.

Researcher: And that kind of answered the next question about why do you believe these attitudes/feelings/beliefs have stayed constant or changed?

Researcher: What are your overall feelings on single gender and what should we know about single gender?

Mom: I honestly think it is much better to be in a single gender class just because it is like I told you they grow up innocently and I love that. I love that she stays friends and stays in touch and knows everybody. The only thing that changes is the teacher each year. But it is not that traumatic for her as far as the change every year to different to different um I guess different other children so they stay pretty much the same. The teacher changes but they are bonded and maintain more of their innocence. And I love that!

Researcher: Thank you.