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# Finding my voice: Adolescent girls' experiences with speaking up and how recounting these experiences impacts future expression

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Finding My Voice: Adolescent Girls' Experiences with Speaking Up and  
How Recounting These Experiences Impacts Future Expression

by

DEBORAH A. CIHONSKI

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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Finding My Voice: Adolescent Girls' Experiences With Speaking Up and  
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Deborah Cihonski

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the meaning of the Expression of Voice experience in adolescent girls using an existential-phenomenological interview approach and also to explore the impact of participation in an interview session talking about Voice. Two open-ended interviews were conducted. During the first interview, participants are asked to "Please think of a specific time when you had something important to say, and although it was difficult, you did speak up and say what you thought. In as much detail as possible, describe that experience." During the second interview, each girl was asked if she "... feel[s] that being involved in this research – my coming to see you – has affected your thoughts, beliefs, or experiences with speaking up and expressing your voice," thereby considering her thoughts, emotions, cognitions and behaviors since the initial interview, talking about them, and noting any changes she may have noticed. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed by the investigator. The first interview was independently thematized

(Jones, 1984) by the author and a doctoral colleague trained in Jones' (1984) analysis method. The second interview was marked and tallied for shared themes, also by the author and the same doctoral colleague. Interrater reliability of the themes reached 97% agreement for the overall sample. Individual transcription reliabilities ranged between 91-98%. Thematic analysis revealed six superordinate themes and four subthemes. The superordinate themes were Felt Strongly, I Hesitated, A Lot of Feelings, What's Going to Happen, I Have to Do This, and I Felt Better. The subthemes Emotional and Physical were part of superordinate theme A Lot of Feelings. The subthemes Their Reactions and Making a Difference were part of the superordinate theme What's Going to Happen? Analysis of these protocols in their totality suggested a complex meaning structure of the co-researchers' Expression of Voice experiences as well as an impact from talking about Voice. This research supports and expands the current literature on Voice, Expression of Voice, and interview participation by providing a more in-depth study of the meaning contained in Expression of Voice and interview experiences. Directions for future research efforts, intervention, and education are discussed.

## Chapter I.

### Introduction

“What would it mean for a girl at the edge of adolescence to tell the truth about her life, to speak honestly and openly about her experience?” asked Brown (1991, p. 71). But age eleven seems to be the last year that many girls are in charge of their feelings and voice. Eleven appears to be the last year that many girls speak honestly and openly about their experiences to anyone, except perhaps their closest and most trusted friends. “Eleven-year-olds cannot be bought,” said Brown and Gilligan (1992), “they are articulate, resourceful and know their own minds.” However, as girls move into adolescence, their relationships often become characterized by disassociation and disconnection from themselves and others (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). As these girls move into womanhood, they often do not remember, tend to forget, or even cover up what they experienced and knew as girls.

#### *Contradictory Messages and Voice*

Adolescent girls receive contradictory expectations from different aspects of their lives: parents, teachers, peers, the media, and themselves.

They are to be sexy and flirtatious but at the same time remain 'good girls'. They are to fend off aggressive male attention while simultaneously meeting teachers' expectations of nonaggressive behavior. They are to be smart and get good grades, yet be quiet, humble, and well-behaved in class. Females are to put domestic life first at the same time that they prepare for financial independence (AAUW, 1996, p.2).

Girls are often prematurely sexualized and the popular media is rife with pictures of highly eroticized pre-teen girls who appear seductive and made-up (Walkerdine, 1998). Girls' clothing is often sexualized, even for the under-10 crowd. Indeed, bras are available for girls of 8 or 9 years of age, low-cut tops and short skirts are marketed to the very young, and it is common to see young girls' clothing imprinted with words such as "hot," "naughty," and "gorgeous," sometimes across the rear end of pants and skirts (Graydon, 2004). Graydon (2004) talks about how this "age compression" encourages girls to grow up faster and to present themselves sexually at a much earlier age. Alternately, popular culture today is beginning to validate the experiences of girls and, in many ways, encourage them to develop into strong, productive women (Schilt, 2003). Teen apparel catalogues and sports equipment makers

are marketing more products to girls, many with messages such as “happy to be a girl” and “I will not lose to a boy” imprinted on them (Schilt, 2003). Girls struggle with these conflicting messages, trying to figure out how to act, when to speak up, and who to please in their everyday lives (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). While many girls, especially those of lower socio-economic status, have adult responsibilities such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for younger children, they are often discouraged from speaking up at school and claiming this same type of authority (Brophy & Good, 1970; Leadbetter & Way, 1996).

During adolescence, as girls mature physically, they become suspended in a sort of limbo, caught between childhood and womanhood. “Girls become looked at, talked about and judged against standards of perfection and ideals of relationship” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 164). Rosenbaum (1993) asked girls what they would “magically” change about themselves if they could. Most teenage girls responded that they wanted to “lose weight and keep it off, [have] blonder hair and bluer eyes, and a perfect figure...” (p. 71) all drawing the girl closer to our society’s stereotypes of ideal female beauty as portrayed by Miss America and the models in women’s magazines which the girls in this study frequently consulted for guidance.

As a part of this struggle with conflicting messages about feminine behavior and appearance, many girls stop stating their honest feelings and emotions. They give up this authentic voice in favor of an acceptable voice that is proper, pleasing, quiet, and nice; a voice that lacks strong opinions or authentic thoughts and feelings. When girls give up their voices -- when they patrol their own feelings and responses so people will like or approve of them -- girls remove their true selves from their relationships. Girls enter into caricatures of what they have been taught of how to behave in that particular relationship. As they please others, they adopt a submissive or false female role that has been perpetuated by popular culture and schooling, teaching girls that women should not be too assertive, too loud, or too domineering (Mazarella & Pecora, 1999). Girls are often passive in their relationships because "speaking up can be dangerous and disruptive. Girls recognize all too well the potential loss of relationship if they do say what they feel and think too forcefully or too directly" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.164).

Since the women's movement began, adolescent female problems such as body image dissatisfaction, sexual harassment, and date rape have been attended to in academic publications and the popular media. Unlike these issues, Voice has rarely been studied. Notably, Loss of Voice has not been labeled as problematic -- indeed

the Expression of Voice is often discouraged as unladylike, crude, or inappropriate (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

*School and Society: Girls' Choices and Opportunities*

By conforming to stereotyped acceptable female behaviors, girls are often limited in their choices and opportunities. Liedel (1992) said that,

By stereotyping women's roles, popular culture plays a role in shortchanging girls by limiting their horizons and expectations. Unintentionally, schools sometimes follow suit, depriving girls of classroom attention, ignoring the value of cooperative learning, and presenting texts and lessons in which female role models are conspicuously absent. (p. X)

Adolescent girls may have aspirations of being involved in a typically "male-oriented" career, yet many schools appear to have a "hidden curriculum" that denies girls guidance in support of these pursuits, discourages them from speaking up in class, and ultimately, dissuades these aspirations (Sadker, Sadker, Fox, & Salata, 1993).

Schools often, even if unintentionally, set lower expectations for girls (Chapman, 1997) and further silence them while perpetuating gender role stereotypes in many ways. For example, girls are often not called on in the classroom while boys speak out (Sadker & Sadker,

1985), women rarely are portrayed as famous scientists (Potter & Rosser, 1992) or musicians (Koza, 1994), or seen in textbooks in general (Corfield, 1999; Mann, 1994; Sadker et al., 1994). Further, girls, as compared to boys, are given less constructive feedback for classroom comments (Sadker & Sadker, 1984) and receive lower expectations (Stein, 2000), none of which will help girls excel in school. When girls do choose to express themselves, the fear of negative consequences can be stressful. This fear is often strong enough to keep many girls quiet (Cihonski, 2003).

While girls do speak up and express honest thoughts and feelings prior to adolescence, research documents that adolescent females, undergoing pubertal change, are most vulnerable to the Loss of Voice phenomenon (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994). While this age group has been investigated frequently, often using quantitative approaches, there is a paucity of qualitative research. Specifically, the nature and essence of adolescent girls' experiences with Expression of Voice remain largely unknown. This study partially remedies this gap in the knowledge base by asking girls who have had the experience of Expression of Voice to describe it in their own words.

### *The Study of Expression of Voice*

Expression of Voice can be described as an experience when a person has something she or he feels is important to say, and although it may be difficult, she or he speaks up and says it anyway. Often the very thought of speaking one's mind is linked to serious physical and emotional reactions (Cihonski, 2003) while the refusal to speak up often results in feelings of inadequacy, fear of rejection, or fear of humiliation (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Cihonski, 2003; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994). This double bind leaves girls in a "Difficult Position" – one where they feel they cannot win since both speaking and silence have serious negative consequences (Cihonski, 2003).

The Expression and Loss of Voice has been studied using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Those studies using quantitative methods such as surveys allow researchers to examine many factors related to Expression and Loss of Voice, such as self-esteem, confidence, depression, and masculine/feminine gender role beliefs (Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002). Such studies fail, however, to allow participants to explore and discuss freely their Expression of Voice experience by describing its accompanying emotions, feelings, and cognitions.

Efforts to understand Expression and Loss of Voice experiences using qualitative methods such as interviews are presently limited by a

number of factors. These include: (1) the descriptive data about the Expression of Voice are often brief and secondary to the primary focus of the study, (2) the interviews are structured in such a way that participants may not be free to articulate their experiences, outside of a prescribed set of questions, or (3) the study focused on factors that may “help” girls express themselves rather than focusing on the nature of the experience itself.

While these research data are valuable in providing information about the Expression of Voice experience, they fail to tell us about the meaning of Expression of Voice for adolescent girls. While it is known that Loss of Voice is prevalent in adolescent females, Expression of Voice, while extremely important, is rare for many girls in settings such as school. Further, little is known about the specific cognitions and emotions that make up the lived experience of Expression of Voice. Specifically, what is the essence of the Expression of Voice experience? To examine this phenomenon more fully, this investigator selected a method in which a rich description of the experience was captured. In addition, there appears to be an impact on interviewees simply by talking about their experiences (Oakley, 1981). To explore the affects of participation in this interview process, the researcher chose to interview girls using an open-ended and supportive method that revealed changes in thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors

following the initial interviews to answer the question, "What is the impact of talking about Voice?"

### *Need for Existential-Phenomenological Approach*

As mentioned previously, the thoughts and emotions of adolescent girls experiencing an Expression of Voice are poorly understood. The research herein provides insight into the nature and essential meaning of the Expression of Voice experience.

The Existential-Phenomenological method allowed for the extraction of emotional information (i.e., from the words of the study participants, also known as co-researchers) from within the individual's "lived experience" (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989) and required the researcher to move beyond an objective interpretation of the data (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). Further, by studying the data within the framework of the lived experience, or contextualizing, the researcher was better able to understand the meaning of the experience itself rather than relying on conjecture.

In summary, this research explored the emotions, thoughts, and feelings of adolescent girls' Expression of Voice using the existential-phenomenological method. Through the use of this method, a clearer picture of the experience of Expression of Voice, within the context of our present culture, was obtained.

*Need for an interactive interview approach.* An interactive interview approach was used in an attempt to capture information central to understanding the lives and viewpoints of girls (Rodriguez, 1998). Each co-researcher was encouraged to give details of her thoughts and experiences since the initial interview so that the possible impact of participating in the existential-phenomenological interview and discussing Voice could be better understood.

Oakley (1981) noted that interviewees often report a “therapeutic effect of talking: getting it out of your system (p.50).” The women Oakley interviewed said that being interviewed had impacted them in several ways, including leading them to reflect on their experience after talking about it, reducing their level of anxiety, normalizing their experience, and giving a valuable outlet for expression of feelings. Since feelings of anxiety and being “different from others” are pervasive in experiences with Expression and Loss of Voice (Cihonski, 2003; Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002; Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Hart & Thompson, 1996), it was thought that talking about this experience in the initial interview might benefit co-researchers.

In sum, an interactive interview approach was used to investigate the phenomenon of the positive effects of talking about experiences. Through interactive interviewing, a detailed accounting

of the effects of interview participation on subsequent behavior was be captured, yielding an important addition to the literature on Voice.

### *Purpose and Description of Study*

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of Expression of Voice in adolescent girls and to explore the impact on girls of participation in an interview session. To do this, 12 co-researchers were asked, "Please think of a specific time when you had something important to say, and although it was difficult, you did speak up and say what you thought. In as much detail as possible, describe that experience." Analysis of the tape-recorded answers yielded data that expands the understanding of Expression of Voice experienced by many adolescent girls, filling a gap deemed worthy of study by many researchers (e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Pipher, 1994; Orenstein, 1994). Further, possible directions for intervention (i.e., linking the co-researchers' words to suggestions for educational reform and self-awareness training) emerged, suggesting new research avenues and relevant implications for education. Approximately one month after the initial interview, the co-researchers were asked, "Do you feel that being involved in this research – my coming to see you – has affected your thoughts, beliefs, or experiences with speaking up and expressing your voice?" prompting girls to discuss any impact they felt that the interview may have had

on their own thoughts, emotions, cognitions and behavior. Analysis of these tape-recorded interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the impact of participation in the interview process, providing important data about a valuable and often overlooked phenomenon – the effect of interview participation (e.g., Devault, 1990; Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Oakley, 1981).

### *Research Questions*

What is the experience of Expression of Voice?

What is the impact of participation in a (single) interview session on the Expression of Voice?

### *Key Term*

*Co-researcher*. The title given to each of the girls, aged 12-16 years, participating in this study.

## Chapter II.

### Review of the Literature

This review of the literature is divided into four sections. The first section, *Voice: Expression and Loss*, examines the research that defines the concept of "Voice", explores societal definitions of the "perfect" girl, and discusses methods used by adults, peers, and society to silence girls or help them express themselves. Also discussed is the literature on different roles adolescent girls fulfill in relationships with adults and peers.

Section Two, *Costs of the Loss of Voice*, reviews the literature on the personal costs to girls and to society when adolescents, knowingly or unknowingly, give up their voices. Further, this section explores studies on girls' thoughts and feelings about the factors that led to their Loss of Voice and the impact of this loss on their lives and the lives of others.

The third section, *Creating, Expressing, and Maintaining Voice*, explores the literature on girls speaking up, including how girls are taught to define Voice, ecological and protective factors that create and maintain voice, and the role of family, school, and societal support systems that help create confident and vocally expressive girls and

women. Also discussed are girls' thoughts and feelings about factors that help them express themselves and the impact that honest, open expression has on their lives. The final section, Study of Voice -- Research Methods and Results, reviews methods used in past studies to explore both the Expression and Loss of Voice, as well as presents a description of, and justification for, the use of the Existential Phenomenological and Interactive Interview approaches in the study of the Expression of Voice and the experience of speaking up.

*Voice: Expression and Loss*

*Definition of voice.* Rogers (1993), in a study exploring voice and courage in the lives of girls and women, referred to the "ordinary courage" of adolescent girls as their ability to speak authentically, "to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart." Most pre-adolescent girls show a strong sense of self and an ability to know and voice their thoughts and feelings (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995, p. 23). The Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development investigated this authentic voice of girls and referred to it as the "resistant voice" or the voice that expresses "honest thoughts and feelings" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

*More than one voice.* The lives of adolescent girls are characterized by the existence of many different voices. Gilligan (1982, 1986, 1987) and her colleagues (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988;

Gilligan, Brown, & Rogers, 1990; Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1989) have studied these multiple voices within girls and stated that most girls speak in at least two different voices. Further, girls switch between voices in their interactions with others (Brown, 1989; Johnston, 1989).

Voices identified in the literature include the aforementioned authentic voice that expresses a strong inner voice and pursues happiness, goals, hopes, and dreams. Once adolescence is in full force, this inner, authentic voice is rarely shared with anyone, except for a few people whom girls trust. Outside of these close and trusting interactions, girls use an "acceptable" voice – one that expresses what they assume others expect them to think and feel (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990). This acceptable voice of girls is used to convey the thoughts, desires, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors believed by girls to conform to the values and expectations of their culture and of significant people in their lives. This acceptable voice itself is multivocal, tailored for interactions with different people. For example, with boys, girls are likely to use a proper voice without elements that will identify them as overly knowledgeable, opinionated, or sexually active – without appearing prudish. Girls have a different acceptable voice with teachers, other adults, or people in positions of power.

In the classroom, boys are typically given more time to answer questions than girls are and often receive more attention and feedback from teachers (Brophy & Good, 1970; Good, Sikes, & Brophy, 1973; AAUW, 1999). Further, research has shown that school responses play a crucial role in recasting potentially “unfeminine” girls’ behavior such as intellectual aggressiveness into stereotypically feminine and encouraged behaviors such as passivity, silence, and deference to others (AAUW, 1999, p.27, Orenstein, 1994). Girls in traditional learning environments will often be quiet rather than risk answering incorrectly or being made fun of or belittled for answering too well in front of peers. Individual researchers and groups such as those in the Harvard Project have asked girls to speculate on why they rarely talk in school or why they will not share their honest thoughts and feelings with others. As much as silence can be a barrier to success, many girls view their silence as an advantage; if they do not understand school work or have unacceptable feelings, no one will know, and they are spared negative judgments by others. Girls often retreat to silence in school, and, when they do speak, their voices frequently lack confidence and assertiveness. As one study reported, “Fitting in often involves playing dumb, hiding their intelligence, and being quiet” (AAUW, 1999, p. 27).

Brown and Gilligan (1992) tracked the progress of girls from first through fourth grade. Then fifth grade, seventh grade, and tenth grade. They documented the gradual loss of girls' sense of self as they approached adolescence, a time when traditional expectations and feminine behaviors are emphasized. These researchers found that, at this time, most girls began to switch from an authentic voice to an acceptable, or "perfect girl/nice girl" voice. As girls got older, they increasingly expressed the acceptable voice (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

Pipher (1994) has argued that with puberty comes cultural pressure to split into more than one "self" (p.38). This pressure comes from places such as television, magazines, schools, movies, and peers. The message is that, if girls are true to themselves, they will be rejected by their peers and by society. Most girls choose to be accepted socially and, as a result, split into two or more selves, one that is authentic and honest and others that are culturally scripted as feminine, and therefore, acceptable. By adopting a false self, girls fail to accept their thoughts and feelings as their own. Only by dissociating and sending their voices underground, by failing to own and acknowledge inner voices of confusion, hurt, and protest, can girls cope with and process the distortions surrounding them. The disconnections from the self are at the same time both adaptive and psychologically wounding. Because self-esteem is based on

acceptance of the self, many girls suffer enormous losses in esteem and confidence through disowning themselves (Pipher, 1994, p.38).

*Adolescent girls and the loss of ordinary courage.* Adolescence is a time of dramatic physical development, a trigger for adults and peers to begin seriously attending to traditional gender roles. Brumberg (1997), in a study about the development of adolescent body image, stated that adolescence is often seen as a time of crisis for girls (xxii). Brown and Gilligan (1992) claimed that one result of this crisis is that this ordinary courage, the resistant voice of girls, often goes underground. They found that during the teenage years girls stop stating their opinions or expressing their honest beliefs, desires, feelings, and attitudes. The silencing of the self and loss of authentic voice have been recognized as a pervasive problem among adolescent girls in Western culture (e.g., Spinazzola, 1999). The effects of this loss are far-reaching, often extending into adulthood (Stern, 1990). For example, the loss of authentic voice has been linked with such things as weak identity development, depression, negative body image, and lower global self-esteem (Hart & Thompson, 1996). Further, it has been hypothesized that this loss of voice contributes to other problems such as teen pregnancy and school failure (Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002).

*The ideal girl.* Orenstein (1994) interviewed approximately 25 adolescent girls, both individually and in groups, as well as their parents and teachers, to collect their thoughts on issues affecting

adolescent girls in schools. Her interviewees came from two separate schools in different areas of the same town. The two schools were markedly different in the socio-economic and minority status of attending students. In Orenstein's (1994) interviews, she found among her sample a "time-honored notion of the good girl: the girl who is nice before she is anything else – before she is vigorous, bright, even before she is honest" (p. 35). She goes on to define European femininity as grounded in delicacy, innocence, and an idealized helplessness (p. 159). The "ideal" girl is "calm, controlled, quiet," and "never cause(s) a ruckus" (Walters, 1988). Brown and Gilligan (1990) talked about the "perfect girl": "The girl who has no bad thoughts or feelings, the kind of person everyone wants to be with... who speaks quietly, calmly, who is always nice and kind and never mean or bossy." In school, girls earn praise for their exemplary passivity, getting reinforced for behaviors that become obstacles to later success (Orenstein, 1994, p.36)

Pipher (1994) similarly analyzed interviews with 13 adolescent girls and concluded that girls discover that it is impossible to be both feminine and adult. Interestingly enough, these results fit the classic findings of Broverman (1970). In the latter study, people were asked to check off characteristics of healthy adults, healthy men, and healthy women. Healthy women were viewed as passive, illogical, and

dependent while both healthy adults and healthy men were viewed as active, independent, and logical (p.39). Pipher's interviews, conducted nearly 22 years later, showed that girls still seemed to buy into this view of typical, and therefore acceptable, female behavior. Pipher went on to contend that, while the rules for female behavior are confusing to girls, the punishment for breaking them is seen by girls to be nonetheless harsh. Girls who speak their minds are labeled as bitches by peers and some adults and unattractive girls are scorned by all (p.39).

An enormous body of literature exists exploring adolescent girls' body image development. It has been well documented that the Western definition for physical attractiveness in females favors excessive, and often unhealthy, thinness (Gil-Kashiwabara, 2002). Fouts and Burggraf (2000) argued that a combination of thinness modeling and vicarious punishment for being overweight contribute to the internalization of gender stereotypes of weight in girls and women. In a media study examining body weight, negative comments, and audience reactions, Fouts and Burggraf (2000) showed that underweight females were overrepresented in television sitcoms. Further, these sitcoms presented men making negative comments about heavier women's bodies, reinforced by audience laughter.

Additionally, girls receive strong messages, both positive and negative, about how their bodies are changing during puberty. One issue of great importance in many cultures is menarche -- the onset of menstruation. Menstruation, both historically and currently, is used as justification for keeping women and girls from fully participating in society and is often viewed as a physical defect (Mazzarella & Pecora, 1999). Although Western culture does not overtly attend to menarche, and it is indeed considered a taboo topic for discussion, it is still of considerable personal and social importance (Crawford & Unger, 2000). Girls often receive little information about menarche and when they do, it is often negatively-toned in nature. Lees (1997) points out that, to begin with, there are no acceptable word for female reproductive body parts, which are stereotyped as unattractive, smelly, unclean, and unpleasant. Additionally, many women view menstruation as something to be kept secret, and, at worst, as a curse, and they pass their viewpoints on to their daughters (Crawford & Unger, 2000).

Women also are presented differently than men in the media and are often sexualized, portraying an unrealistic and impossible-to-obtain body image. Crawford and Unger (2000) reported that female television characters are usually younger than male characters by an average of ten years. Further, Crawford and Unger (2000) stated that

women in 73% of all magazine ads were found to be decorative and sexualized while the number of women shown partially clad or nude has risen in recent years. According to a study by Kong (1997) on the portrayal of women in the media, 40% of the women in magazine ads are shown touching or caressing themselves. Additionally, in music videos, women engage in significantly more sexual and subservient behavior than men (Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan, & Davis, 1993).

Even girls' toys present unrealistic body images and often encourage premature sexualization. The Barbie Doll has been said to give children a warped perception of beauty and attractiveness (Assunta & Jallah, 1995). The probability that a human female would have the same proportions as Barbie are about 1 in 100,000 while the odds of a man being built like Ken are 1 in 50 (Norton, Olds, Olive, & Dank, 1996).

In summary, evidence has shown that girls receive an unclear and impossible-to-achieve image of the ideal female through the media, their peers, adults, and society. Trying to live up to a vague and unattainable standard -- one that tells girls to be smart but not too smart, painfully thin yet voluptuous, sexy but pristine -- puts girls at risk for a wide variety of social and psychological problems. Girls,

faced with such standards, often find that the only smart and safe strategy is to dumb down and shut up.

*Peers and adults silencing girls and self-censorship.* Institutions and individuals in society reinforce the definition of femininity and acceptable behavior for girls in both subtle and obvious ways. Peers and adults of both genders reinforce feminine ideals and behaviors. In addition, women and girls model it for each other and themselves.

Orenstein (1994) reported that girls monitor each others' behaviors and keep a vigilant watch over each other and themselves. Girls of all socio-economic, racial, and ethnic classes reported that they had to be very careful with their behavior because other girls and boys would pass judgments on them, resulting in negative consequences. Girls reported concerns about being branded as "sluts," and gaining a ruined reputation (Orenstein, 1994, p. 236). These girls reported that, while they did not like being called "schoolgirl," being called "slut" was equally as bad. They felt their behaviors had to fall into a narrow path between appearing too good and appearing "slutty." Girls reward what is acceptable, often reminding one another to be sweet and compliant. One of the girls interviewed by Orenstein (1994) stated that she wanted to be a lawyer. Her friend admonished her, reminding her that "sweet girls" like her make ineffective attorneys. The girl responded by saying that

she was indeed “too cute” to be a lawyer (Orenstein, 1994, p. 35). In effect, this girl saw herself as too cute to be competent.

Judy Mann (1994) cited a study showing that female babies at seven weeks of age are encouraged to smile and vocalize more than boys. Mann suggested that girls are taught from infancy to be pleasant and “to make the atmosphere around them pleasing” (p. 23).

Teachers are more likely to describe females than males as “ideal” students (AAUW, 1991). One of Orenstein’s (1994) interviewees reported that teachers like girls because they are quieter, nicer, and better behaved. Through the schooling process, girls are taught to be self-inhibiting, to become outsiders or passive observers of the learning process rather than competent participants (Orenstein, 1994). While girls often speak of themselves in terms of their grit and independence, these qualities are rarely displayed in the adolescent classroom (Orenstein, 1994).

Even adults who hold gender egalitarian values inadvertently reinforce feminine ideals. For example, a school counselor charged with helping girls talk about sexual harassment at school completed a successful session with a group of girls. Following the session, she offered them candy, adding “like we need to add to our rear ends!” (Orenstein, 1994, p.122) At a local county camp, the author co-facilitated groups aimed at helping girls speak up, identify their values,

and become more confident. At the end of the program, the lead facilitator gave each participant a "Girls Only" journal with six writing prompts per page – one of which was "Fun! Fads! Fashion! (Music, Movies, New Clothes, Shopping, Parties, etc.)". On the home-front, one well-intentioned father was reported to have informed his teenage daughter that he wanted her to be a "man's woman" -- one who would be able to "please the man she was with" (Orenstein, 1994, p. 90).

The conventions of femininity and womanhood are complex with mixed messages coming from different sources (i.e., mothers versus fathers, teachers versus parents, TV and music personalities (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). The influence of adults on the development of adolescent girls is apparent, but male adults and female adults influence girls in different ways. Men often are the accepted authority figures in the home where girls are meant to be subordinate, even submissive (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995, p.79). At the same time, fathers send the message to their daughters that girls are to be attractive, sexy, and "daddy's perfect little girl."

Both men and women influence the behavior of girls through reinforcement and punishment, but women also directly model acceptable behaviors, offering a visual display of appropriate or desirable behaviors for girls. Because girls perceive a similarity between themselves and women, women tend to hold a

disproportionate amount of referent power over the development of adolescent girls as compared to men who are not able to model or teach directly in the same way as women. In support of this conclusion, direct evidence exists that mothers serve as significant role models for girls, and are important sources of information and guidance, showing and telling their daughters how they should feel, behave, and how their bodies measure up (Usmiami & Daniluk, 1997). In their study, Usmiami and Daniluk (1997) explored the relationship between self-esteem, gender role identity, and body image for mothers and their adolescent daughters. They found that, as mothers' body image scores became more positive, so did their daughters. Further, a positive correlation was evident between mothers' and daughters' levels of self esteem. Body image scores were positively correlated with self-esteem for both daughters and mothers.

Indirect evidence has also shown that adolescent daughters more than sons are at greater risk for depressive disorders and symptoms when their mothers are depressed (Sheeber, Davis, & Hops, 2002). Song (2001), in a study of Korean women's career choices and their relationships with their mothers, reviewed literature from the United States and abroad. She concluded that mothers play a crucial role as models and socializers and are highly influential in their daughters' perceptions of themselves and their sex-role attitudes.

For example, women who model subservient roles pass along a negative self image to their daughters due to shared gender.

In summary, the self, other individuals, and society reinforce behaviors in adolescent girls that are viewed as stereotypically feminine. Girls report monitoring their own behavior with others so they will not gain a ruined reputation or be thought of as a know-it-all or stupid. Peers and adults reinforce and punish, both directly and indirectly, behaviors seen as feminine or unfeminine. Girls receive mixed messages about femininity: to behave in a way that is neither too good nor too willful.

#### *Costs of the Loss of Voice*

*Sacrificing the self.* The pressure placed on girls to shape themselves, both within and without, to comply with the dominant cultural ideals of womanhood and femininity, of "selflessness", are enormous and pervasive (Gilligan, 1982). Hart and Thompson (1996), in a study linking traditional gender role characteristics and higher rates of depression among women, stated that "silencing the self includes deferring to the needs of others, censoring self-expression, repressing anger, judging the self against a selfless ideal, and censoring experience to establish and maintain safe, intimate relationships" (p. 409). Further, they stated that there is a gender-

specific set of cognitive schema for appropriate behavior in intimate relationships.

Research (e.g., McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Finemore, 2002; Pipher, 1994; Stern, 1990) has suggested that girls in early adolescence (12-14 years of age) undergo a major developmental transition in terms of gender-role identity, body image, and psychological structure, often at great cost to themselves and society. Stern (1990) reviewed several studies showing that adolescent girls were more likely than boys to be depressed, have more negative self-appraisals, and have poorer emotional well-being. In her study of adolescent girls and sense of self, Stern found that girls lose significant ground in terms of confidence and self esteem during adolescence. She further added that "there are strong indicators that disavowing the self will be sustained into adulthood" (p.114).

Many girls undergo a change in attributional style during adolescence; they begin not to trust their own judgments and lose the ability to tolerate frustration without becoming overwhelmed (Pipher, 1994). Pipher said that, when the girls in her research failed, they were more likely to attribute the failure to internal factors such as a lack of ability. That is, they thought they were stupid and tended to give up while boys tend to attribute failure to external factors and stick with difficult problems and situations. Just as bad, girls tended to

attribute success to luck and external factors while boys were more likely to view successes as evidence of ability. Importantly, Pipher (1994) notes that recent research has shown that this gap between boys' and girls' attributional styles may be closing, with girls being more likely to attribute their successes to internal factors. Further, she noted that girls in her study had a tendency to become anxious when faced with difficult situations, which interfered with problem-solving skills, leading to further failure and even more anxiety and self-doubt the next time around. Additionally, this cycle of anxiety and failure can account for the withdrawal of many girls from math and science – keeping girls from wanting to be astronauts and brain surgeons. According to Pipher (1994), many adolescent girls lose their resiliency, assertiveness, and optimism. They become less curious and energetic and less inclined to take risks. They are more deferential, self-critical and depressed (Pipher, 1994). Pipher observed that girls in her research were not able to say why they lost interest in their dreams and aspirations, they just reported their “mysterious” disappearance (p. 63).

*Relationship losses.* Jack (1991) developed a theoretical model of self-silencing behavior in girls. She posited that women and girls organize their experiences according to their relationships with others. Gilligan and her Harvard Project colleagues (1992) also believed that

adolescent girls give up their voice and adopt an inauthentic façade of compliance and niceness to build and maintain relationships. Girls are socialized in traditional feminine roles that teach them to relinquish themselves. These traditional values espouse ideals such as likeability and self-sacrifice in order to make others comfortable and preserve relationships (Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002). Ironically, the inauthentic self detracts from the quality of the very relationships girls are seeking to build and protect. The spouse, friend, child, parent is relating to a hollow woman/girl, a façade, deprived of contact with the real person herself. The paradox here, said Brown and Gilligan (1992), is “the giving up of relationship for the sake of Relationships” (p.7). When a girl's voice is silenced or compromised, when she patrols her own responses and feelings so people will continue to like her, she removes herself from living in the relationship and enters into a caricature of what she's been taught a relationship should be.

Hart and Thompson (1996), in a previously cited study on the link between depressive symptoms and female gender roles, stated that depression in women and girls is related to the value they place on establishing and maintaining close relationships. Jack and Dill (1992), in a study focusing on the effect of levels of intimacy in relationships and depression in women, noted that characteristics such as over-

investment in relationships and over reliance on the opinions of others are associated with reduced levels of well-being.

Hagborg (1993) used Harter's Self Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA) to explore the self concept of girls and boys. She noted gender differences in self-concept ratings, with females in this study rating themselves significantly higher on close friendships and social acceptance than on physical appearance and athletic competence, as compared to boys, further illustrating the importance many females place on relationships with others.

Girls want to win the attention and affection of others and fear distancing themselves or being perceived as "different" from the assumed feminine standard. "Guys like it if you act all helpless and girly, so you do", one of Orenstein's (1994) participants offered. As one girl stated, following participation in a classroom discussion, "Oh god, I hope I didn't say something... that makes me different" (Orenstein, 1994, p. 100). Becca, a quiet girl, said, "I don't raise my hand in my classes because I am afraid I have the wrong answer and I'll be embarrassed" (p. 11). Later in the interview process, she went on to say that she never talked in class unless she was "really, really, sure of an answer, and then sometimes not even then" (Orenstein, 1994, p. 89). Orenstein (1994) said that some girls take their silence so far that they will not even cough in class.

*Societal losses.* Society suffers serious losses when girls give up their voices and confidence, and subsequently, chances for future achievement. As previously noted, Pipher (1994) found that most adolescent girls withdraw from participation in math and science -- keeping them from potential future careers as astronauts and brain surgeons. Indeed, while the overall math gap between boys and girls appears to be shrinking, this is only in lower level math. Girls are still less well-represented in most higher-level courses in math, science, and computer science (AAUW, 1999, p. 12, 13). Since a lack of education is positively correlated with fewer life opportunities, it is apparent that girls' lack of participation in higher-level technical courses will ultimately lead to diminished opportunities later in life. Women lacking in education also tend to be viewed as incompetent and incapable (Yoder, 2002, p. 213). Indeed, there is a significant under-representation of women in political and upper-level corporate positions, as well as in the fields of science and technology, thus depriving society of women's creativity and leadership skills in these areas (Yoder, 2002). Finally, girls -- and all of society -- are deprived of important role models, contributing to a continuation of this cycle.

Further, a lack of education generally leads to a lower future income. Indeed, there is a serious discrepancy in income levels of men and women in the workplace (Yoder, 2002). Women without the

means to support themselves financially often become dependent on others for financial welfare, leaving them in poverty and vulnerable to abuse. Significantly, two out of every three poor women have been victims of domestic violence, with 25% of these experiencing violence within the past year, as compared to the lifetime average of 21%-34% among the general population of women (Yoder, 2002). A lack of education and subsequent lack of income puts women, and their children, at serious risk. Society cannot possibly benefit from the abuse of a substantial number of its members who will then be unlikely to become productive citizens.

Hall (2000), addressing the issue of domestic violence in families, stated that by not critically exploring in classrooms the issue of violence against women, schools become implicated in the silencing and “normalizing” of abuse. Again, silencing has far-reaching implications of loss for girls, women, families, and society.

### *Creating, Expressing, and Maintaining Voice*

*Dumb down or speak up?* As stated previously, girls in Western culture receive mixed messages about what it means to be an acceptable girl and, as a result, girls have difficult choices to make. Girls regularly receive subtle and overt messages from parents, peers, school, and the media that nice girls are quiet girls. When girls have

strong opinions or have something they feel is important to say, often they are not likely to speak up if they feel there may be negative consequences for expressing their Voices.

Girls make difficult decisions about when to express themselves in school, with peers and adults, and in society – often opting for silence as the easiest and least risky choice. When girls don't speak up, they often feel strong physical and emotional reactions, may question their own integrity and identity, feel helpless, and conclude that what they have to say is simply not important or not worth expressing (Cihonski, 2003).

*Naming Voice.* The term "Voice" is common in feminist literature (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; Weis & Fein, 1993) but this concept seems to remain in academic circles. While girls and women outside of academia hear messages almost daily about issues important to them such as eating disorders, suicide, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, the topic of Voice is rarely discussed, often remains unnamed and, therefore, is unknown and generally thought of as unimportant to girls, women, and society. Indeed, many girls and women see the giving up of Voice, and subsequent silence, as a positive trait among females in Western culture. Quiet women are strong women. After all, quiet girls and women cannot be called "nags" or "bitches". This study, through an

Interactive Interview asked girls about changes in their thoughts and behavior after an initial interview when they become aware of Voice, the giving up of Voice, and their own experiences with Speaking Out under difficult circumstances.

*Support Systems: School, Family, and Society*

While many girls use an acceptable voice, rather than an authentic, honest voice if they choose to speak in school, with adults or peers, or in groups, girls often choose silence over verbal expression. However, virtually all girls will at some time speak their minds and say what they think, even if it is difficult. Some studies suggest ecological support or protective factors that empower girls to speak out without, or in spite of, fear. Other studies show that modeling by mothers and other females or adults can help girls find and use their voices. Further, school expectations and environments can be tailored to encourage participation by girls in class.

*Schools: Environments and Teachers.* Schools, through construction of girl-friendly environments and teacher training have been shown to be effective in helping girls speak up and express their honest thoughts and feelings. Environments built more on collaboration among students than competition between them may be more in line with girls' relational styles (Sadker & Sadker, 1994) and may offer girls more opportunities to speak freely and comfortably.

Since girls benefit from learning environments built on non-judgmental collaboration among students, it has been suggested that classrooms structured so girls will feel comfortable speaking up without fearing recrimination are classrooms where girls are more successful. As one girl stated, when questioned about her single-sex math class, “[the single sex class] just makes you feel like you can do it and you’re all the same and they [the boys] should not laugh at you. So it just gives you confidence, like to say, ‘Oh shut up, I can do it’” (Jackson, 2002, p.43). At present, there are 15 single-sex public schools in the United States and over 40 co-educational public schools that are experimenting with same-sex classes – many devoted to math and science for girls (Newsday, 2003).

Many researchers have viewed women’s colleges as places that “take women seriously” (Tidball, Smith, Tidball, & Wolf-Wendel, 1999) and offer women the faculty attention and leadership opportunities often lacking in co-educational environments (Bank, 2003; McCoy & DiGeorgio-Lutz, 1999; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Astin (1997) stated that “single sex colleges show a pattern of effect” in that students are more academically involved, show increased intellectual self-esteem, and have increased chances of gaining positions of leadership, completing baccalaureate degrees, and aspiring to higher degrees. Indeed, girls and women educated in same-sex environments are

more confident, more likely to venture into advanced math and science, and more likely to go to graduate school (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Schools can help girl with identity development and expression of voice through various contexts. Wallace-Cowell (2000) suggested a book discussion groups where girls and their teachers read and discuss gender-sensitive books that focus on adolescent female characters dealing with a variety of common and difficult issues. This caring and connected context was shown to facilitate the emergence of Voice in adolescent girls. This nurturing environment helped girls develop trust in themselves and others as well as confidence in their intellectual abilities, while realizing that their voices were important and should be heard. Further, the use of gender-sensitive text material addresses the common problem of lack of representation of girls and women in curricula. Importantly, the girls in this program were taken seriously as intelligent people, or as the researcher noted,

By taking part in reading, writing, and talking about literature, the girls were not only able to be taken seriously by me and others in the group, but they began to take themselves more seriously... as people who have something to contribute...[and] ultimately change the

ways they view themselves as intellectually capable young women. (p. 36)

Clearly, programs that teach girls that their voices -- and personhood -- are important and valued are a boon to the development of voice, confidence, and ultimately, the success of girls.

Teachers are more likely to describe females than males as "ideal" students (AAUW, 1991) often because girls are quieter, nicer, and better behaved (Orenstein, 1994). Teachers aware of Loss of Voice and gender issues may be more willing to give girls ample time to respond, look favorably on girls who speak up or are "intellectually aggressive", and offer constructive feedback to all students. In response to the differential treatment girls and boys receive in schools, Sadker & Sadker (1994) said, "We ought to be training teachers to be teaching girls and boys fairly." Techniques recommended for teachers include building an awareness of Voice and silencing in girls as well as other gender issues, attending to girls in the classroom and encouraging their participation, and raising expectations for girls. Teachers must also become aware of their own biases and lowered expectations for girls in the classroom. Through programming, careful construction of the learning environment, and teacher training, schools can help girls gain the confidence to make their voices heard.

*Family: Models and Encouragement.* Mothers and other females are important role models for girls, reinforcing feminine ideals and behaviors. These role models tell girls -- both verbally and through modeling -- how to act and what behaviors are acceptable.

Girls need strong, encouraging, adult females and peers to model leadership behaviors, including speaking honestly in front of others (Kelsch, 1999). Indeed, girls themselves need an awareness of their own voices and the importance of stating their honest thoughts and opinions aloud (O'Reilly, 2001). Through modeling and by learning leadership and social skills, girls will be better able to negotiate relationships, school issues, and self-esteem difficulties.

Further, girls are less likely to monitor their own behavior and are more likely to speak up when they are with adults and peers who they feel will not pass judgments on them (Orenstein, 1994).

*Society: Affirmations of Voice.* Institutions and individuals in society reinforce the definition of femininity and acceptable behavior for girls in both subtle and obvious ways. However, girls today have more consumer choices and power than ever before. Increasingly, companies are viewing girls as a viable target market (Schilt, 2003). And while many are targeting girls with traditional toys in "feminine" colors such as pink and pastel, some are offering girl-positive messages on items such as T-shirts and stickers and encouraging girls

to participate in traditionally male sports such as surfing and skateboarding (Schilt, 2003). As companies increase their profit margins by targeting girls, girls – and the women in their lives – have more power to resist oversexualization, objectification, and exploitation of girls and women in the media, in advertising, and with hurtful or harmful products. These girls – and women -- are being encouraged to speak up and are finding their voices (Pipher, 1996).

*Confident girls, expressive girls.* Confident, expressive girls are more likely to succeed in school, relationships, and life. They are more likely to become successful women with a greater level of education and relationship satisfaction, are less likely to live in poverty, and therefore, are less vulnerable to domestic violence (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Pipher, 1994; Yoder, 2002). Clearly, the study of Expression of Voice/Speaking Out is a phenomenon worthy of study.

### *Study of Voice*

*Research methods used to study voice.* Both qualitative and quantitative methods provide important data toward understanding the phenomenon of Loss of Voice, although they differ methodologically.

Quantitative research on the Voice in adolescent girls has traditionally focused on the comparison of scores on standardized

measures, such as self-esteem and depression rating scales, especially by comparing male and female adolescents (Marshall & Arvay, 1999). Such studies have provided valuable insight into the intensity, frequency, and prevalence of Loss of Voice as well as highlighting possible correlational factors. Survey studies are valuable in establishing the prevalence and possible determinants of loss of voice but require the researcher to infer from the data the nature of the experience. Although some of the more advanced quantitative techniques, such as structural equation modeling, allow for more powerful internal/causal statements to be made (Borg & Gall, 2001), the data gathered using such techniques do not permit the development of the meaning, essence, or structure of the lived Loss of Voice experience.

However, research using qualitative methods, such as interviewing girls individually or in small focus groups, self-report surveys, or anecdotal evidence from therapists, is more common (Rogers, 1993) and yields increased detail about individual experiences. It also allows the formation of hypotheses about possible causal forces. The interview method is the most frequently employed qualitative technique used in research on Loss of Voice. Despite the time-intensive nature of interviews, they are fruitful sources of information (Crowther & Sherwood, 1997; Seidman, 1991) and have

been recommended by some researchers in the study of both the Speaking Up/Expression of Voice and Loss of Voice experiences (e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994).

The present study used two individual interview techniques, specifically the existential-phenomenological interview to examine the Speaking Up/Expression of Voice experience and the interactive interview to explore the possible impact of taking part in the existential-phenomenological interview. Since this study used an interview technique, the following review will be limited to those studies using a qualitative interview technique approach to the study of Loss of Voice.

*Interview studies.* Interview studies often present the actual language of the individual speakers' in answering questions about the Loss of Voice. Most of these studies are focused mainly on the antecedents to or consequences of the Loss of Voice. Some researchers chose a structured format while others favored an open-ended interview technique. One study was located that used the existential-phenomenological approach with adolescent girls (Cihonski, 2003).

Brown and Gilligan (1992) used a "relational method" of interviewing in which the listener/interpreter is empathetic and responsive to the speaker. They stated that "by taking in the voice of

another, we gain a sense of entry, an opening, a connection with another person's psychic life" (p.28). From 1986-1990, Brown and Gilligan (1992) interviewed 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls at a private school in Cleveland, Ohio.

Before talking with the girls, the authors observed each girl in the classroom setting. Following observation, girls were interviewed using an open-ended format. An example of a typical exchange involved the investigators asking the girls to think of a time they were upset in class. When girls responded that they were sad or angry about such times as when they were not called on to talk in class, the girls were further queried with prompts such as, "Was there anything else you were thinking about?", "So your decision was to walk out of the room. And do you think that was the right thing to do?", and "Does the teacher know why you left the room?"

Brown and Gilligan (1992) interviewed the same group of girls over a four-year period and found that girls' psychological development is "inherently traumatic." The authors present a powerful picture of loss in girls entering adolescence, in terms of academics, relationships, self-esteem, voice, and sense of self.

Brown and Gilligan's (1992) data, while revealing important components of the Loss of Voice phenomenon, fail to make known the essence or meaning of the experience of the loss itself. Further, Von

Kaam (1969) stated that it is essential that the co-researcher is able to express her personal emotions, thoughts, and feelings easily, allowing for a clear and detailed recollection. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade girls participating in this study may not have yet developed the ability to recall and articulate their experiences as accurately as the older girls.

Mary Pipher (1994) used an open-ended interview technique in her study of 13 adolescent girls. She analyzed the interviews and concluded that girls give up their voice in early adolescence, discovering it is impossible to be both feminine and adult. Pipher's interviews showed that girls still seemed to buy into a view of the typical, and therefore acceptable, female as illogical and passive. Pipher's (1994) research, while examining many variables correlated with the loss of voice, such as depression and self-esteem, did not explore the meaning of the Loss of Voice experience itself.

Orenstein (1994) interviewed approximately 25 adolescent girls, both individually and in groups, as well as their parents and teachers, to collect their thoughts on issues affecting adolescent girls in school. Her interviewees came from two separate schools in different areas of the same town. The two schools were markedly different in the socio-economic and minority status of attending students. Using an open-ended interview format, Orenstein and her participants explored issues

such as relationships with boys, parents and teachers not listening, appropriate and acceptable behavior for girls, and future orientation. Overwhelmingly, even girls who spoke of themselves with grit and independence were silent in the classroom, preferring to be silent than wrong and humiliated.

Orenstein's (1994) interviews yielded a great deal of information about adolescent girls' experiences in school, in relationships, and with silencing. The data from these interviews, however, failed to explore or attempt to discover the very nature and meaning of the Loss of Voice experience itself.

Marshall and Arvay (1999) interviewed 13 early adolescent students, both male and female, at a private Canadian school. The interviews were conducted using Brown and Gilligan's (1992) relational method. Children were asked a series of eight questions about voice and silencing. The first question asked the children if they had been silenced, or not listened to, by persons in authority and to tell what that experience was like. While both boys and girls reported feeling powerless, they interpreted the meaning of the experience differently, with girls excusing and accepting the nonlistening behavior of adults. Further, the girls and boys were asked to tell about a situation where they wanted to say something but did not say it.

The children were asked if they were glad they did not speak up or if they thought they should have spoken up. While boys' responses generally reflected regret for not having expressed their honest and true thoughts and feelings, girls' responses to this and similar questions showed that they focused on saying what they "should" say rather than to risk appearing uncaring or rude by speaking their honest feelings and thoughts.

Although this question appears similar to the question asked of co-researchers in the present study, Marshall and Arvay (1999) were "interested in learning about situations in which the participants had lost their voices and what understanding they had gained about why this happened" (p.46). Further, this particular question about experiences with voice asked for only brief responses and was only one question among many asked during the interview session. The authors were not attempting to understand the fundamental nature and meaning of the Expression or Loss of Voice experiences themselves. Rather, they tried to identify situations, factors, and gender-specific reactions to the speaking up and loss.

In Marshall and Arvay's (1999) study, the researchers followed a predetermined interview format that may have been restrictive, limiting the respondents' freedom to express themselves openly. This potential limitation likely impacted the study's ability to reveal the very

personal nature and meaning of the Loss of Voice experience. Further, the brief answers did not allow for elaboration on the meaning or essence of the experience.

Cihonski (2003) interviewed 11 adolescent girls, ages 12 to 16 years, about Loss of Voice Experiences – times when girls had something important to say but did not speak up and say what they thought. Using an existential-phenomenological approach which seeks to understand the fundamental nature and meaning of the human experience through descriptive techniques such as interviews (Valle & Halling, 1989), each co-researcher was asked to “think of a specific time when you had something important to say, but did not say it. In as much detail as possible, describe that experience” (Cihonski, 2003, p.46). These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, and then the interviews were analyzed for common or shared themes among the interviews. In fact, analysis of the interviews yielded six superordinate themes or themes shared by all the participants and four subthemes shared among some, but not all the co-researchers.

The six superordinate themes revealed were Difficult Position, Feeling, Might Explode, Not Worth It, Who Am I, and Nevermind. The four subthemes were Physical Feelings and Emotional Feelings under the superordinate theme of Feeling and So Much to Lose and Strong under the shared theme of Difficult Position. Each co-researcher

reported that she found herself making a difficult decision about whether or not to speak up (Difficult Position) in which she considered her options, carefully weighing her potential gains and losses for speaking up and remaining silent (So Much to Lose/Strong). This decision making process was characterized by an emotionally upset state of Feeling (i.e., Hot, Shaky, Angry, Diminished) which Culminated in each co-researcher feeling like she Might Explode (Cihonski, 2003, p.71). All co-researchers concluded that there was simply too much to lose and it was Not Worth It to speak their minds. Following this decision to remain silent, each co-researcher questioned her decision in some way. Most expressed some form of self-recrimination and others even questioned their own identity, asking, "Who Am I?" Finally, every co-researcher ended her description of her own experience with a statement such as "nevermind" – ultimately each girl decided that the Loss of Voice Experience was not worth thinking about and was not really important after all.

Cihonski (2003) included a graphic representation of each these themes and their relationships to one another, visually symbolizing the complex meaning structure of the Loss of Voice Experience. While this study looked at the Loss of Voice experience, it did not explore the meaning structure or emotions and cognitions contained in an Expression of Voice experience.

In summary, while the previously mentioned qualitative studies are a rich source of information about the phenomenon of Voice, these studies did not get at the very essence and personal meaning of the Expression of Voice itself.

### *Existential-Phenomenology*

Existential-Phenomenology has its foundations in both the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (Valle & Halling, 1989). Kierkegaard thought it essential that philosophy address the concrete existence of the individual while clarifying the basic themes with which human beings struggle. Husserl's approach was more academic in nature and attempted to understand human consciousness and experience by rigorously, and without bias, studying things as they appear in the world.

Martin Heidegger was one of the first to join existentialism and phenomenology into a discipline seeking to understand the meaning of human existence without presupposition or personal bias (Valle & Halling, 1989). Psychology has traditionally embraced a natural scientific approach with several assumptions about phenomena in the natural world: they must be observable and measurable, and it must be possible for more than one observer to agree on their existence and characteristics (Valle & Halling, 1989).

More recently, the definition of psychology has grown to include both experience and behavior. If we define psychology as the complete science of human experience (Ornstein, 1985), the need for approaches that elucidate the meaning of these experiences are needed. Through the psychological application of Existential-Phenomenology, we seek to understand the fundamental nature and meaning of the human experience through descriptive techniques, such as disciplined reflection and interviews or thematic verbalization (Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 6, p. 10). Through this process of verbalization, the unity and interrelatedness of the individual and his or her world and the meaning of the lived experiences are revealed (Valle & Halling, 1989, p.7). Through a "bias-free" examination of these verbalizations, a fuller understanding of the themes of human experience can be drawn (Eckartsburg, 1986).

The verbalizations that take place during existential-phenomenological inquiry can be viewed as a "conversation" between co-researchers, the people describing their experiences and the person directing and recording that description (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Following this conversation, the researcher attempts to extract relevant themes revealed through the descriptions of co-researcher life events. These themes are thought to reveal a

superordinate structure of experiences across all human beings regardless of personal traits or demographics (Jones, 1984).

In Existential-Phenomenology, the researcher's own biases and preconceptions are put "on hold" through the process of bracketing (Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 11). Bracketing is a self-reflective process by which the researcher's own assumptions or biases about the targeted phenomenon are verbalized and made as clear as possible to the researcher and others so that the world of the co-researcher can be considered as pure phenomena without bias or preconception (Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 11). This process allows co-researchers to make the stories of their lives known without the interference of researcher bias or interpretation.

*Existential-Phenomenology and the experience of Speaking Out/Expression of Voice.* In this study, adolescent girls were asked to describe their experiences with Speaking Out/Expression of Voice. Each girl was asked to describe a specific experience, in a specific context, in as much detail as she was able remember it. She was encouraged to give details of her experience so that the thoughts, sensations, feelings, emotions, and perceptions involved in the experience would be known.

As previously stated, it was imperative that co-researchers had experienced the phenomenon, in this case an Expression of Voice. The

girls had to be familiar with the phenomenon as well have the ability to articulate their experiences to enhance the insight their reports afford. Each girl had an expert role as the informant and was seen as an equal to the researcher in the research process. This equivalency of power is of the utmost importance in the interview process because the researcher's role should be one that only fosters, rather than leads or guides, discussion through brief responses and probes for more description (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1990). Polkinghorne (1988) also cautioned the researcher to remain aware of unexpected variables that may come up in co-researcher dialogue so that the researcher's own preconceptions do not impact the elicited descriptions.

The essence and form of girls' experiences was sought, and since the existential-phenomenological approach does not attempt to predict, control, or explain phenomena, the girls' experiences were considered independent of cause and effect relationships (Valle, King, & Halling, 1988). Importantly, each girl's awareness of her particular experience in a given situation must be understood, rather than merely a description of the particular events that occurred at the time (Polkinghorne, 1989).

It is believed that the dialogues of these girls, and subsequent themes extracted from them, provide insight into the nature of the experience of Expression of Voice in adolescent girls. Further, this approach revealed previously unknown aspects of this experience so future researchers may continue to explore their significance. Glassford (1991) found that educators who asked adolescents for their thoughts and opinions on the design of an acceptable drug and alcohol abuse prevention program, as well as possible rules about drug and alcohol abuse, discovered valuable information that was different from what the researcher had theorized would be effective.

#### *Interactive Interviews: Talking about Voice*

This study involved interviewing the original group of co-researchers approximately 30 days after the existential-phenomenological interview to explore the impact that participation in the initial interview process had on their Expression of Voice or any subsequent experiences with Voice. A feminist interactive interview approach was used in an attempt to capture information central to understanding the lives and viewpoints of girls (Rodriguez, 1998). Each co-researcher was encouraged to give details of her thoughts and experiences since the initial interview so that the possible impact of participating in the existential-phenomenological interview and

discussing Voice was known. Again, it was imperative that co-researchers had experienced the phenomenon, in this case a discussion of Expression of Voice. Therefore, only girls who were previously interviewed and showed the ability to articulate their experiences participated in the Interactive Interview.

Oakley (1981) interviewed expectant mothers and said that these interviewees often reported a “therapeutic effect of talking: getting it out of your system” (p.50). These women said that being interviewed had impacted them in several ways, including leading them to reflect on their experience after talking about it, reducing their level of anxiety, normalizing their experience, and giving a valuable outlet for expression of feelings. Since feelings of anxiety and being “different from others” are pervasive in experiences with Expression and Loss of Voice (Cihonski, 2003; Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Hart & Thompson, 1996; Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002), it is thought that talking about this experience in the initial interview may have benefited the co-researchers. Indeed, three co-researchers contacted the investigator (Cihonski, 2003) to report that, after talking about their experiences with Voice in an interview, they experienced a marked difference in the way they expressed themselves, especially in school. Each girl said she was talking more and, as one girl put it, “I am just not afraid anymore. I realized I was being silly [by not

talking], that I was just as important as everyone else, and they felt just like I did. I don't feel stupid anymore if I get something wrong. I can help other people by asking questions too."

An interactive interview approach was used to investigate the phenomenon of the positive effects of talking about experiences. As stated previously, it has been suggested that the "interview best fits the qualitative paradigm" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 397). This approach creates a safe, open, and unstructured environment in which girls can freely share their experiences (Devault, 1990; Oakley, 1981) Further, girls had a chance through repeated interviews, to change and revise the recorded version of their experiences (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000). Through interactive interviewing, a thick, rich accounting of the effects of interview participation on subsequent behavior was captured, yielding an important addition to the literature on Voice.

Each participant went through the initial interview process before being able to complete an interview on the effects of that initial interview. Therefore, each girl needed time following the initial interview to experience any effects and subsequently report them. An interview approximately 30 days after the second interview on Expression of Voice was conducted to gather information on the impact of that interview.

## *Chapter Summary*

As stated previously, both quantitative and qualitative data collected thus far on the Expression of Voice experience and the perceived impact of the interview experience are valuable. However, they fail to capture the meaning or essence of the Expression of Voice experience and the impact of the interview experience from the adolescent girl's perspective. Specifically, quantitative data require the researcher to make inferences about the experiences of girls with Expression of Voice and the impact of interview participation, and presently available qualitative data are also limited for several reasons.

First, much of the descriptive data on Expression of Voice and interview impact are brief and were gathered as secondary to the primary focus of each study. Second, participants in interviews were often younger than age 12 years and may not have been able to recall and articulate clearly their experiences (e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Further, only one interview study was located that was conducted with the desired age group using the existential-phenomenological approach that probed co-researchers to reflect and describe as they re-lived their experiences. However, this study only inquired about a Loss of Voice experience and did not include information on Expression

of Voice. None of the studies reviewed used an interactive interview approach to determine the perceived impact of taking part in an interview. Instead interviewers used “guides” or focus groups to gather information.

Finally, although Expression of Voice experiences were well described by some authors (i.e., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994), they featured no systematic analysis of the descriptive data. Therefore, it is uncertain whether the theme(s) contained therein are shared across the participants. Thus, no meaning structure was developed as will be the case in the present study.

In sum, adolescent girls are undergoing changes that are pushing them toward adulthood. This study targeted young females in the midst of this developmental period when the Loss of Voice experience appears to be a common phenomenon, and the Expression of Voice experience, a diminishing phenomenon.

This study, using the existential-phenomenological approach and employing the thematizing method proposed by Jones (1984), gathered data that illuminate the structure and meaning of adolescent girls’ Expression of Voice experiences. It is believed that, in doing so, a better understanding of the essence of girls’ Expression of Voice

experiences was revealed. Further, this study, using an interactive interview approach (Ellis, Kiesenger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Oakley, 1981), explored the impact of the initial existential-phenomenological interview on thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors, and, through this process, revealed the potential impact of participation in the interview process.

## Chapter III.

### Method

#### *Design*

This is a feminist, qualitative study that employed both an existential-phenomenological interview to collect detailed descriptive information about the experience of Expression of Voice in adolescent girls and an interactive interview to explore the impact of participation in this existential-phenomenological interview.

The existential-phenomenological approach was used to examine the thoughts, sensations, and feelings of each girl's own individual experience with Expression of Voice to "explicate the essence" of this experience (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p. 13). The basic assumption of the existential-phenomenological paradigm is that, in order to fully understand the meaning of human experience, we must investigate "phenomena as they are experienced by people" (Becker, 1992, p. 33).

Oakley (1981), using an interactive interview method, reported that 73% of the women she interviewed experienced a "therapeutic effect of talking: getting it out of your system" (p.50). The interactive interview approach was used to explore the impact on thoughts,

beliefs, and behaviors, of girls after their participation in an interview about Expression of Voice, a potentially emotion-laden and controversial topic.

It has been suggested that the “interview best fits the qualitative paradigm” (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 397). Further, Borg and Gall (1989) stated that investigators must maintain vigilant awareness of any self-biases or presuppositions that may surface under examination that may influence the interview. A review of the literature indicated that wide support exists for the interview format as most appropriate for qualitative research (Becker, 1992; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). To ensure the collection of unbiased data, it is imperative that, during the interview, the researcher remain cognizant of her own assumptions about the experience so as not to influence the interview content (Becker, 1992). The interviews conducted for this study were “semi-structured” in that the co-researchers were asked the same style question and subsequently probed by the investigator as needed to encourage them to elaborate on their answers.

*Co-Researchers.* In line with feminist approaches, the term “co-researcher” was chosen because girls in this study are considered the experts of their own experiences. Additionally, each girl took on the role of a co-researcher by helping to group themes and to visually depict these themes from all study participants. The selection of co-

researchers for this study followed the guidelines set forth by Moustakas (1994), who identified several criteria essential for co-researchers to possess so that meaningful information would be presented in the interview. The following five criteria were said to be essential: experience with the phenomenon under investigation, considerable interest in understanding the meaning of her or his own experience, an ability to articulate that experience in a detailed and meaningful way, an agreement to participate in a tape-recorded interview, and agreement to the possible publication of the investigator's research data. To be selected, co-researchers must acknowledge and agree to these criteria.

Co-researchers were adolescent girls between the ages of 12 and 16 years. Although demographic diversity among co-researchers was welcomed and achieved, no specific efforts were made to recruit a diverse sample. The goal for selection was to find adolescent girls who have experience with an Expression of Voice, and thus could serve as "experts" on this topic. It was imperative that they not only have experienced the phenomenon but also will be able and willing to describe that experience. Thus, a "representative sample" of the adolescent population was not needed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Table 1 contains demographic information.

Table 1

Demographic Data

<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>
Range 12-16	Range 5-11
<u>M=13.6</u>	<u>M=8.6</u>

Note: Race/Ethnicity data were also collected. Of the 12 girls who volunteered, 7 were Caucasian, 2 were Hispanic, 2 were African American, and 1 was Asian.

As stated, of crucial importance was each girl's ability to articulate her thoughts and feelings in a clear, detailed manner. Given that most children, by early adolescence, have developed the ability to speak abstractly about themselves with a complex vocabulary, it is believed that none of the co-researchers selected for this study displayed significant difficulties verbalizing their thoughts and feelings.

*Sample size.* Among existential phenomenological scholars, it has been noted that the number of co-researchers in any given investigation may vary considerably (Glesne & Peshkin, 1991; Jones, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1989). While some studies have used as few as three, others have had more than 300 co-researchers. For this study, it was desirable to interview between 10 and 12 co-researchers to achieve the ultimate goal of eight usable interviews. In fact, twelve usable interviews were completed. It is believed that this number of co-researchers achieved the "saturation" point recommended by many

existential-phenomenological researchers. This saturation cut-off point, according to Seidman (1998), has been determined to be the point at which there is a "saturation" of information or an exhaustion of repetitive themes across co-researchers. This exhaustion of potential themes contained in each description of the experience allowed the investigator to understand the essence of the experience of Expression of Voice as clearly and fully as possible.

*Selection.* The researcher sought volunteer co-researchers, through friends and colleagues, who matched the desired criteria. The researcher explained thoroughly all relevant aspects of the study to all potential co-researchers and their parent(s) or guardian(s). This description included explanations of the voluntary nature of the research study, the use of audio-taping, confidentiality issues, and the approximate time involved (i.e., four separate meetings).

*Researcher.* The researcher for this study is a 37-year-old Caucasian female enrolled in a doctoral program in a south Florida university School Psychology program. During her graduate education she successfully completed coursework, practicum experiences, and two internships that required objectivity, rapport-building ability, and exceptional interviewing skills with both children and adults.

As a female, the researcher experienced an Expression of Voice when she was 12 years old upon confrontation by an older girl in her

neighborhood who, in front of several other older girls, accused her of gossiping. This particular girl was known for bullying and harassing younger children in the neighborhood, including the researcher, who had never spoken up for herself during past harassments. The researcher felt strongly about being wrongfully accused and decided to speak up, although it was difficult to do.

Today she incorporates feminist pedagogy, an understanding that both society and our schooling practices are gendered, hierarchical, and oppressive, into her teaching and daily life. Additionally, she frequently discusses Voice with her students and people she meets in her practice as a School Psychologist. As a result, she has found that many of her female undergraduate students, co-workers at her internship sites, girls she works with in educational settings and support groups, and friends report vividly remembering experiences of an Expression of Voice in their adolescence. Her students, co-workers, educational group members, and friends have reported on many occasions, that the researcher's description of this phenomenon and the ensuing discussion stimulated their awareness of Voice, and helped them regain their lost voice and speak out about issues important to them.

*Instrument.* Three instruments were used for this study. The first "instrument" was the core question posed to the co-researchers:

“Please think of a specific time when you had something important to say, and although it was difficult, you did speak up and say what you thought. In as much detail as possible, describe that experience.” (See Appendix A).

To elicit further description from the co-researchers, the investigator used probes in which information was repeated back to the co-researcher to ensure understanding and to invite the co-researcher to elaborate on her answer. Further probes were used to help the girls shift their focus from historical accounts of the event that are not considered part of the experience itself. These clarifying probes included statements and questions such as: explain what you mean, tell me more, can you expand on that?, how so?, what was that like?, are there other words to describe that?, and can you return to describing...?

The second “instrument” was the interactive question posed to the co-researchers asking them to elaborate on their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors following the first core question: “Do you feel that being involved in this research – my coming to see you – has affected your thoughts, beliefs, or experiences with speaking up and expressing your voice?” (See Appendix A). Finally, the third instrument was a demographic data sheet (see Appendix B) which was

used to collect basic demographic information about the co-researchers.

To elicit further description from the co-researchers, the investigator again used probes in which information was repeated back to the co-researcher to ensure understanding and to invite the co-researcher to elaborate on her answer. These clarifying probes included statements and questions such as: explain what you mean, tell me more, can you expand on that?, how so?, what was that like?, are there other words to describe that?, and can you return to describing...?

#### *Procedure*

*Bracketing interview.* Prior to conducting co-researcher interviews, the researcher herself engaged in a reflection of the initial research question following an existential-phenomenological process called a bracketing interview. The purpose of this bracketing interview was to identify any preconceived notions she has about the topic and to allow her to identify and acknowledge her own experience (i.e., emotions, thoughts, and feelings) with Expression of Voice. Further, this helped protect her from imposing her own personal views on her co-researchers' descriptions (Polkinghorne, 1989; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Her interview was conducted and bracketed by another graduate student who is also conducting an existential-

phenomenological study. Because this graduate student also was chosen to assist in the thematic analysis of the co-researcher interviews, the investigator completed a bracketing interview with her to reveal any potential biases.

*Pilot study.* To uncover potential procedural difficulties, a pilot study with three co-researchers was completed. These interviews were included in the actual sample selected for participation. The pilot study helped the investigator refine her skills in conducting an existential-phenomenological interview.

*Interviews.* Four separate meetings for interviews (Oakley, 1981; Seidman, 1998) with each co-researcher were completed during this study at a location selected by the co-researcher and her parent(s) or guardian(s).

During the first meeting of approximately 30 minutes, the researcher introduced herself to the co-researcher and her parent(s) or guardian(s). At this time she obtained the co-researcher's and parent's/guardian's consent to participate in the study (see Appendix D). The researcher asked the co-researcher to consider the research question for a short period of time (e.g., three to four days) before a second meeting took place. Each co-researcher was asked to keep a journal of her thoughts and reactions over the interview period. A detailed discussion took place about the types of information that

would be useful in the journal. Additionally, some "sentence starters" or writing prompts were given. The researcher also maintained "field notes" (See Appendix E) during this time to track her reactions and thoughts during the interview process. At this time, the researcher set up the second meeting and answered any questions the co-researcher or her parent(s)/guardian(s) had.

Meeting two was audiotaped and lasted approximately 40 minutes. The consenting parent/guardian was not be present at this meeting, and the goal was to capture the co-researcher's emotions, thoughts, feelings, and sensations about a specific experience of Expression of Voice. The investigator's role during this second interview was simply to listen to the co-researcher's description of her experience, ask for more detail, seek clarifications when needed, and keep the interview centered around the girl's experience, rather than studying the event itself or providing therapeutic intervention. The researcher attempted to create a relaxed, safe, and nonjudgmental atmosphere during interviews so that her co-researchers were comfortable recalling and sharing as much detail as possible about their experiences. At this second interview, a time for the third meeting was set up.

Following the second meeting, the audiotape of the interview was transcribed. The researcher and her colleague completed a

thematic analysis of this transcription. This thematic analysis followed the guidelines set forth by Jones (1984), and is further described in the Data Analysis section to follow.

During the third meeting, the researcher presented each co-researcher with a thematized protocol of her interview to ensure that her experience was fairly and accurately represented. Each girl was encouraged to offer any changes she thought would make the protocol a more accurate representation of her experience. At this third meeting, the girls were given another opportunity to discuss any additional thoughts they would like to add, as well as to supply new information not recalled or reported in the second interview session. Further, this third interview allowed each co-researcher to ask any additional questions she may have had. A time for the fourth meeting was set at the conclusion of this third interview.

The fourth meeting also was audiotaped and lasted approximately 15 minutes. The consenting parent/guardian was not be present at this meeting, and the goal was for each girl to articulate any impact she feels participation in the existential-phenomenological interview may have had on her thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors with regard to Voice. She also had an opportunity to add any final thoughts on Voice or the interview experience itself. This closing interview was used to gauge the potential impact of talking about a potentially

emotion-laden topic, the Expression of Voice, on subsequent behavior, cognitions, emotions, and beliefs. The fourth interview session concluded the interview process with the researcher restating the level of confidentiality in the study and thanking the co-researcher and her parent(s) or guardian(s).

### *Data Analysis*

Analysis of the initial interview transcripts will be completed following the guidelines set forth by Charles Jones (1984) entitled "Training Manual for Thematizing Interview Protocols Phenomenologically." This systematic method of analysis allows for the development of themes derived from co-researchers' words expressed during interviews. There are multiple steps required to complete thematization and these steps are detailed in the following section.

*Thematic analysis.* Each transcription was first read in its entirety to gain an understanding of the overall meaning contained therein. Second, tentative thematic units, or "units of significant meaning" were marked off (Jones, 1984). These thematic units contained the actual words used by the co-researcher and, in fact, using the co-researcher's exact words was of great concern. Specific units were distinguished if there was a change in verbal direction of context of the speaker's words. Following Pollio's (1984)

recommendation, transitional words such as “but” and “and” were left out of the thematizing process since they generally offer little meaning. In the third step, these tentative thematic units were charted on a separate piece of paper. The themes were then sequenced as they were presented in the interview. Fourth, the themes were clustered, which involved organizing tentative units into groups by identifying similar ideas or phrases in each unit of expression. These groups were then numbered and named as specified by Jones (1984) in the thematic analysis process. During the naming process, stringent efforts were made to preserve the verbatim words spoken by the co-researchers

Once these interview transcriptions were thematized, the investigator examined all the protocols together to determine if any superordinate themes, or shared themes among all the co-researchers, emerged. If multiple superordinate themes emerged, this suggested that it might be possible to characterize the essence of a specific experience across all the co-researchers involved in the study (Jones, 1984).

*Interactive interview analysis.* Each transcription from the fourth interactive interview was read in its entirety to gain a fuller understanding of each girl’s perception of the impact of talking about Voice in the initial existential-phenomenological interview. These

transcripts were analyzed in a manner similar to that used by Oakley (1981). Girls' "Yes" and "No" answers to the question of whether they felt an effect from participation in the interview process were tallied. For answers of "Yes" -- those girls who reported an impact -- the particular type of impact or impacts were marked and tallied.

If multiple changes were noted, this suggested that participation in the interview process impacted the thoughts, emotions, cognitions, and behaviors of co-researchers involved in this and, potentially, similar studies.

### *Reliability*

This researcher enlisted the help of another graduate student to thematize and tally protocols. Both the researcher and the fellow student independently read and thematized a sample of protocols, allowing a measure of reliability. These results were compared to determine whether the themes identified were consistent across raters. This measure of reliability (i.e., percent agreement between raters) was thus be obtained. The desired level of reliability for this study will be .70, a level of reliability commonly used in quantitative and qualitative research as a whole (Thompson, 1996). Indeed, a level of .97 was reached. Additionally, a triangulation of the data occurred with data from the third interview. At this time, each co-researcher was asked if her experience was fairly and accurately

represented. Using multiple raters contributed to the trustworthiness of the analysis of the obtained data (i.e., triangulation) and a circumvention of potential researcher biases.

## Chapter IV.

### Results

This chapter presents the thematized results of 12 existential phenomenological interviews completed with adolescent girls ages 12-16 years. Also presented are the reported impacts co-researchers experienced by participating in the interview process of discussing an Expression of Voice experience. Each girl reported that she had experienced one or more Expressions of Voice and eleven of twelve participants reported some impact from speaking with this researcher about their experiences. The contexts and topics of the girls' experiences will be reported first, followed by the themes extracted during analysis of the interview transcripts, and finally the reported impact. All themes and impact categories were named using the words of co-researchers. Further, since co-researchers chose pseudonyms for themselves prior to commencement of the interview process, each girl will be referred to and identified by her chosen name throughout the remainder of this paper. All quotes were carefully selected to represent equally the experiences of all co-researchers.

### *Context and Topic of the Reported Experience*

The contexts in which the co-researchers experienced an Expression of Voice varied, as seen in Table 1. The most common setting for an Expression of Voice was at school, reported by eight girls, followed by at home (two girls), with one girls experiencing Expression at a summer camp, and one at a friend’s house.

Table 2

Context of the Expression of Voice Experience

<b>Context</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
School	8
Home	2
Summer Camp	1
A Friend’s House	1

Co-researchers reported four different topics when discussing their Expression of Voice experiences, as seen in table 2. Six girls reported that they were standing up for their own rights or beliefs while four girls were sticking up for a friend. Two girls were talking to adults when they spoke their minds and one girl was giving advice a friend.

Table 3

Topics of the Expression of Voice Experience

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Standing up for own rights or beliefs	6
Sticking up for a friend	4
Telling an adult about a friend's problem	2
Advising a friend	1

*Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis of the 12 interviews detailing Expression of Voice experiences yielded six superordinate themes or themes shared by all the girls. Four subthemes also were revealed. Further, many additional themes were shared among some but not all of the co-researchers.

The following section describes each theme in descending order of frequency of its appearance. A graphic representation follows each theme's description to symbolize the meaning of that structure visually in the Expression of Voice of experience. Finally, all themes revealed in the experience and their relationship to one another will be represented graphically.

*Felt Strongly*

Felt Strongly emerged as a superordinate theme in all girls'

Expression of Voice experiences. All 12 participants revealed that they Felt Strongly about the issue at hand prior to their Expression of Voice. Several girls simply stated, "It was important." Each girl identified a specific moment when she Felt Strongly and was offended, upset, or angry, and felt a strong desire to stand up for what she thought or believed.

As co-researcher Cindy expressed about standing up for her friend who was being called names, "I felt so strong about it... she was in tears and I was really mad!" Joanne was upset and offended by the content of a book her friends were reading and, although it took her nearly 2 weeks to tell her friends how she felt, she said "I know my religion, I didn't think it was right." She went on to say, "I was shocked. I wanted to be like everyone else [but] that really got to me." Nicki, discussing a time when she advised a friend over the telephone not to run away with her boyfriend said, "I was so afraid she would not be my friend. I knew she would be mad because she liked that guy so much. I was scared for her though and I knew I was right. It was so hard, the hardest time to ever speak up." Andrea put it this way, "I was angry and offended. I could not believe what I was hearing, how mean people can be. They pretended to be friends with this girl and I thought, how would I feel? I was so angry, so mad, and I just had to bite my tongue to not tell them exactly what I thought

right then and there. I knew I had to stand up for my friend. I could not let those girls talk bad about her. I mean what kind of friend am I if I do that? I'd be just like them." Riley, upon hearing a racist joke, noted, "I was so offended...I was so upset."

Each co-researcher identified a variety of strong feelings and opinions about an issue or topic about which they wanted to speak, however, none of the girls chose to speak at that moment. Each girl waited before expressing her thoughts and feelings.

Figure 1 shows a "glowing" heart – a common symbol for strong, passionate feelings. This depicts Felt Strongly; the first step of the Expression of Voice experience for all 12 co-researchers.



Figure 1. Theme of Felt Strongly

*I Hesitated*

Each co-researcher reported that, although she Felt Strongly and wanted to speak up, she Hesitated. I Hesitated was the second superordinate theme revealed by all 12 girls participating in this study.

While some girls hesitated to speak for only a short period following the triggering event about which they Felt Strongly, some girls waited much longer – co-researcher Michelle waited three days while participant Joanne waited nearly two weeks before speaking up. As Ruby put it, “I kind of froze for a second....I was like ‘no’.” Riley stated, “I did hesitate...it took me a minute to get up the courage.” She went on to say that “if [people] know they’re right they just say it but if they’re not sure then they’re hesitant.” Riley reported a great deal of concern about whether she was “right” and how people would react to her if she said the “wrong thing.” Michelle reflected, “I had to wait, I had to give it some thought...I had this inner voice telling me to be quiet, to just shut up.”

Figure 2 symbolizes the point at which each girl Hesitated before speaking. A girl with her hand over her mouth was chosen to depict this moment of silence and hesitation. Below her is the Felt Strongly heart near the place of her own heart, because although she remained silent, she still feels passionate about the topic or issue at hand.

## I Hesitated



Figure 2. Theme of I Hesitated in relation to Felt Strongly

### *A Lot of Feelings*

The superordinate theme, A Lot of Feelings, was reported by every co-researcher as occurring during the period of Hesitation before speaking. The Expression of Voice experience involved a range of deep physical and emotional reactions for every girl interviewed. The predominant emotional feelings reported during Hesitation were Mad, Scared, and Anxious while all girls reported some physical feelings such as Dizzy, Hot, or Sick. Most girls said they were nervous, intimidated, worried, scared, feeling awkward, or stressed out. Co-researcher Riley said, "I have an anxiety attack before I even talk." She further reflected when recalling a time that she confronted a peer about an offensive joke, "I got really nervous and my palms started sweating and my face started turning red and I was like, I was tongue-

tied and it was horrible. It was the most agonizing thing ever! It's very stressful." Recounting a time prior to confronting a friend about running away, Nicki put it this way: "I was scared witless!" Cindy, remembering how she felt when preparing to stand up to an older boy, said, "My mouth got really dry... I had butterflies in my stomach. I was mad, very, very mad, upset and mad." Allison said, "It took me about 20 minutes to get up the courage to tell him to stop cheating off of [my test]. I was so scared, afraid and angry, nervous, really nervous and just shaking with fear. I didn't know if I could do it but I had to. It was so frightening. I felt dizzy and far away from myself. Like I was looking at myself and I was not even me anymore." Every girl interviewed reported a wide range of physical and emotional feelings during Hesitation.

*Emotions.* Surrounding Hesitation, girls reported emotions that can be grouped into three specific categories: Mad, Scared, and Anxious. All girls reported emotions that fell into at least one of these three categories, and nine of twelve girls reported emotions in all three groups.

The first subgroup of emotions expressed by participants, Mad, describes part of the Expression of Voice experience as leaving them feeling Angry, Heated, Furious, Mad, and "really pissed off." All twelve girls used the term "Mad" when describing their feelings during

Hesitation and ten of the twelve girls used the term "Angry." Michelle, relating the strong emotions she felt after an older boy who called her a name, said she didn't "say anything. I try to be polite. I was just so angry, I wanted to kill him and cut him up and burn him up and feed him to the alligators! I was so mad!" Marissa, describing an experience with a girl who was bullying her at summer camp said, "I have never been that mad and pissed off in my whole life. I just stared at her and hated her. I wished my anger could have cut right through her."

The second group of emotions, Scared, was reported by 9 of the 12 girls interviewed. These girls described their initial desire to talk and the fear they felt while hesitating. The co-researchers used terms such as Scared, Horrified, Afraid, Fearful, and Petrified to describe their apprehension. Nicki said that she was "nervous" and "scared witless" while Allison reported being "scared half to death and then some. I was afraid, just totally petrified." Ruby said she felt scared and guilty, like she had "done something wrong" just by thinking of speaking up.

The final Emotion in the superordinate category of A Lot of Feelings can be classified as Anxious. Nine of 11 participants reporting feeling some form of anxiety, describing this feeling with terms such as Nervous, "anxiety attack," and Worried. As previously reported,

Riley said, "I just have an anxiety attack before I even talk." Samantha recounted her feelings of anxiety this way: "I was worried, worried, that's all. What [my mother] would think, worried about everything. My nerves were on fire. I could hardly even think of speaking at that moment."

*Physical.* Within the superordinate category of A Lot of Feelings, participants reported a variety of physiological reactions felt during the Hesitation phase of their Expression of Voice experience. Physical can be categorized into three distinct reactions: Hot, Dizzy, and Sick.

Nine of the 12 participants in this study reported feeling that can be categorized as Hot or Sweaty. Riley said her face "turned red" while Marissa said, "I was burning hot, sweating, I am sure my face was bright red. I could feel it boiling up inside of me." Cindy remembered feeling "like I was getting really hot, feverish." Nicki, telling about a time she wanted to stand up to a classmate who was teasing her about her "frizzy hair" said, "I had a fever, I think...I was really hot and my hands kept opening and closing and my teacher keeps it 60 degrees below in that classroom so it is kind of a wonder I was hot."

Seven co-researchers described feelings that can be described as Dizzy, using terms such as Dazed, Confused, or Far Away. Allison related, "I felt dizzy and far away from myself. Like I was looking at

myself and I was not even me anymore,” when describing her feelings about confronting a classmate who was cheating from her test. Riley used the term “tongue-tied,” while Andrea said she “couldn’t think straight.” Jessica said she was “in a daze, confused and lost” when classmates were laughing at her and her groupmates during a class presentation.

The final category of physical reactions, Sick, described by 5 of the 12 co-researchers was put this way by Marissa, “It made me sick, I had to wait, I felt like throwing up, like I was empty inside.” Cindy said she had “butterflies in her stomach” while Amy stated that she was “sure I was going to lose it, I felt sick and angry, my stomach hurt, it was upset. I felt terrible!”

The theme, A Lot of Feelings, in Figure 3 is shown as a hazy cloud containing all the Emotions and Physical Reactions reported by co-researchers. All girls reported feelings from both subcategories. A cloud was chosen, since several girls used terms such as “foggy” and “hazy” to describe their feelings at this point in the Expression of Voice experience. The Feeling cloud completely surrounds I Hesitated as seen in Figure 2, showing that A Lot of Feelings encompassed this part of the Expression of Voice process.

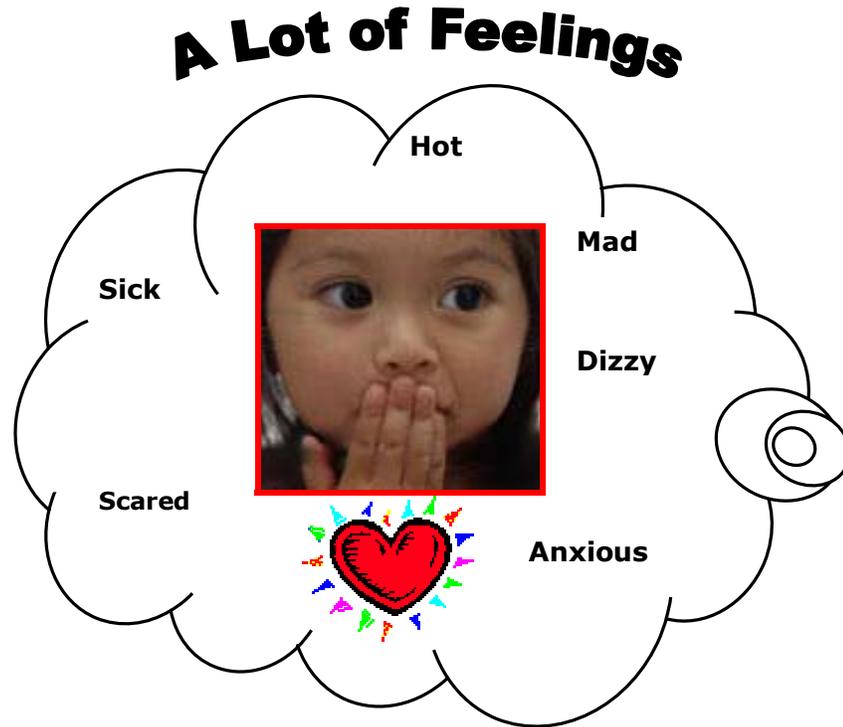


Figure 3. The theme, A Lot of Feelings with subthemes Emotions and Physical shown surrounding theme of I Hesitated, all in relation to Felt Strongly

*What's Going To Happen?*

Each girl reported that, after she Hesitated, she entered a decision-making process, wondering What's Going to Happen if she speaks or does not speak. What's Going to Happen is the fourth superordinate theme reported by all girls interviewed for this study. During this time of reflection, each girl weighed carefully the consequences for speaking up and remaining silent. As Michelle recounted, while deciding if she should confront an older boy who

called her a name, "I spent almost three days deciding. I was crazy thinking about it." Riley, reflecting on this decision-making process, said it was "always a mental process" where she was "deciding to talk, to not talk, who to please, how important is the issue, what will change."

As captured by Riley's words, the superordinate theme of What's Going to Happen is divided into two subthemes capturing this thought process about the consequences, both positive and negative, for speaking and for remaining silent. Girls reported that they thought they would experience a wide variety of negative consequences for speaking up (Their Reactions) but identified only one or relatively few, but highly positive, gains (Making a Difference) if they chose to say what they really thought. As co-researcher Amy put it, "If I did speak up, people might learn something. I could really help. I was thinking about making a difference, but I was worried that the person would be upset or offended...I didn't want to make them feel stupid or make them mad. I decide what to say and if I should talk depending on the other person."

*Their Reactions.* Their Reactions emerged as a subtheme of What's Going to Happen. All co-researchers identified multiple negative consequences they expected to receive if they spoke up. These negative consequences centered mainly around the reactions of

people in the environment and fell into one of four categories: Mad, Hurt, Trouble, and Future Losses.

All girls reported that if they chose to speak, someone would get Mad. Joanne said she only speaks up about the "right things" and, when asked by this researcher to define how she decided what the "right things" are, she said they are "the things that won't make people mad...like it's wrong to make people mad or upset them."

Each girl also reported that if she chose to speak, someone would get emotionally Hurt. Riley stated of her thought process when deciding if she should speak, "it's about...how many people and how many feelings I have to please" while Joanne stated, "I had to think about other's people's feelings also."

Ten of 12 participants worried that they would cause or get into Trouble for speaking up. Cindy worried about getting into trouble stating that, "School rules say you shouldn't start anything or conflict anything." She was "afraid of the outcome, what might happen if certain things, like if we got in a fight I might get suspended and my Mom might find out. I was afraid of the consequences..." Ruby worried that "I could cause so much trouble" for her friend and that friend's family by telling a school counselor her friend was being abused at home.

Nine of twelve girls worried about the Future Losses they would experience because of the negative judgments of adults and peers such as a friend disliking them for speaking up, a parent not allowing them to be friends with someone anymore, or rumors being spread about them at school. As Ruby put it, "There might be rumors. She would hate me," while Joanne wondered, "Is everyone going to make fun of me? Were rumors going to start spreading around and stuff?" Samantha wondered, "If I told my Mom that [my friend] wanted to kill herself, I figured she would not want me to hang around with her anymore. I'd lose my friend if I told but I might lose her if I didn't tell. I could not win!" Riley also stated, "I was just nervous because what if I was wrong? ...I had to decide."

*Making a Difference.* The decision-making process of What's Going To Happen resulted in the identification of one or more positive consequences for speaking up. Nine of the twelve co-researchers were able to identify only one positive consequence for speaking up, and ten of twelve girls felt that they needed to speak up to Make a Difference. Notably, while the girls in this study were able to identify very few positive consequences for speaking, they chose to speak up anyway, because, as Andrea stated, "I knew there were so many reasons not to say anything, but I felt so strongly, I had to do it, had to say it, just so they knew how I felt, just to do the right thing." Samantha said,

“Some things you just have to say, sometimes you have to suck it up and stand up and do the right thing. You could make a big difference.” Jessica put it this way, while remembering her thought process, “Sometimes you have to do it, no matter who gets mad. They’ll get over it. Sometimes, no matter what, you have to put your view out there. I knew I had that right.” Each girl identified that speaking up was her best choice but she had to Feel Strongly enough about the issue and be able to justify her actions in spite of the negative consequences she expected. Michelle said of speaking her mind: “I would make everyone mad at me. It would just make it worse but I didn’t care... I had this rush of feeling stronger and knowing I was right, knowing I was worth something after all, that someone had to listen to me.”

Figure 4 shows a scale symbolizing the decision-making process each girl underwent as she decided What’s Going to Happen? As depicted, although the number of negative consequences for speaking far exceeded the positive consequences, each girl decided that Making a Difference “outweighed” the potential negative reactions and consequences.

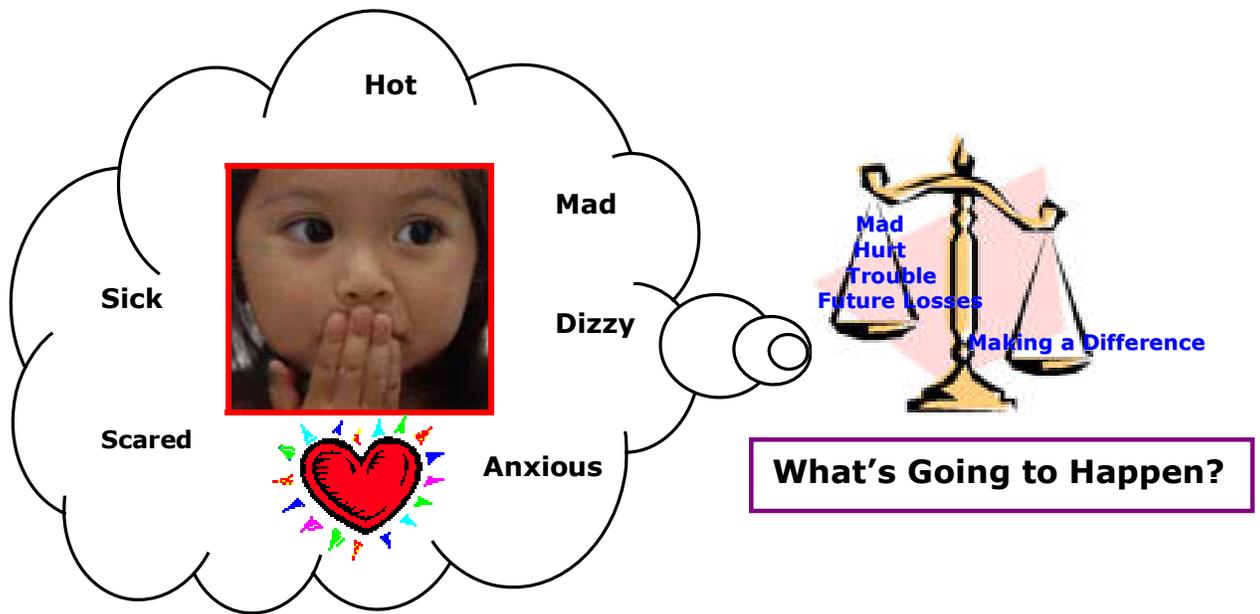


Figure 4. Theme of What's Going To Happen with subcategories Their Reactions and Making a Difference in relation to themes Felt Strongly, I Hesitated, and A Lot of Feelings  
*I Have To Do This*

All co-researchers decided to talk after their process of reflection about What's Going To Happen. Joanne remembered, when thinking back on how she told her friends she did not like the book they were reading, "So like about two weeks after the whole [issue] raised, I finally stood up and finally talked about [it]....I was rolling back and forth in my chair and I was like, how are they going to react to this so I thought 'this is something I need to do' then I decided to just do it." Ruby simply stated, "I thought, 'Oh crap, I have to do this,' so I did."

Jessica, upon confronting her classmates said, "No one and nothing is going to stop me now. I have to tell them what I think. Do it NOW!" Cindy said, "I knew I had to do it. I had to say something, I had to defend my friend. I had to speak up for myself. I had to do what I had to do." Riley reflected that, "I could not get away with not doing it. It needed to be said" and, "There are some things you just have to speak up about no matter what the consequences." Each girl made the difficult decision to speak even after identifying a variety of potential losses and negative reactions to her voicing her opinion. Even Joanne who stated early in her interview that "it's wrong to make people mad or upset them," reflected later that sometimes "[people] might still get mad but... you know you need to speak up for some issue."

Figure 5 shows a girl with a look of determination on her face, symbolizing each girl's conclusion that she Had to Do This – she had to speak up.

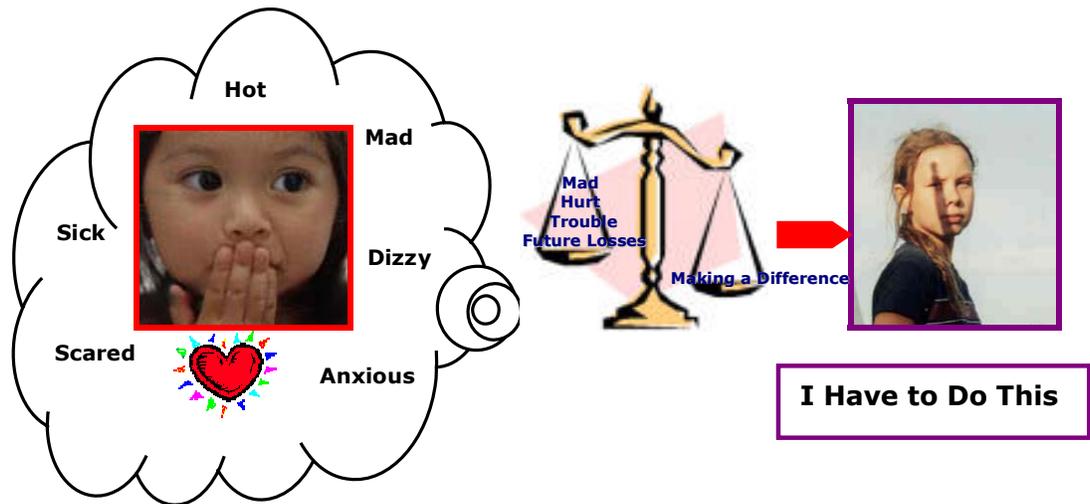


Figure 5. Theme of I Have to Do This in relation to themes Felt Strongly, I Hesitated, A Lot of Feelings, and What’s Going to Happen?

*I Felt Better*

Each participant related that, after speaking, she Felt Better. Most girls reported feelings of Strong, Happy, Relieved, Confident, Not Afraid Anymore, and being “glad it’s over.” In her interview, Ruby stated triumphantly, “I was like yes! I did something right for once... I almost felt like a hero.” Cindy reflected, “I did what I thought was right and I felt better... It was so hard but I knew I had to do it, I finally had enough.” Michelle, recalling the time stood up to an older boy, said, “I was happy because he knew how I felt...I had a lot of power right then.” However, as two other co-researchers had similarly reflected, Michelle went on to say that, although she had spoken up, she wanted to say even more but “I didn’t want to piss him off. I still

couldn't be totally honest. It was a sad place to be." Overall, every girl in this study Felt Better after speaking and no participants reported any regrets about having spoken up.

Figure 6 shows a group of girls who appear proud and happy, representing each co-researcher who Felt Better after speaking up.

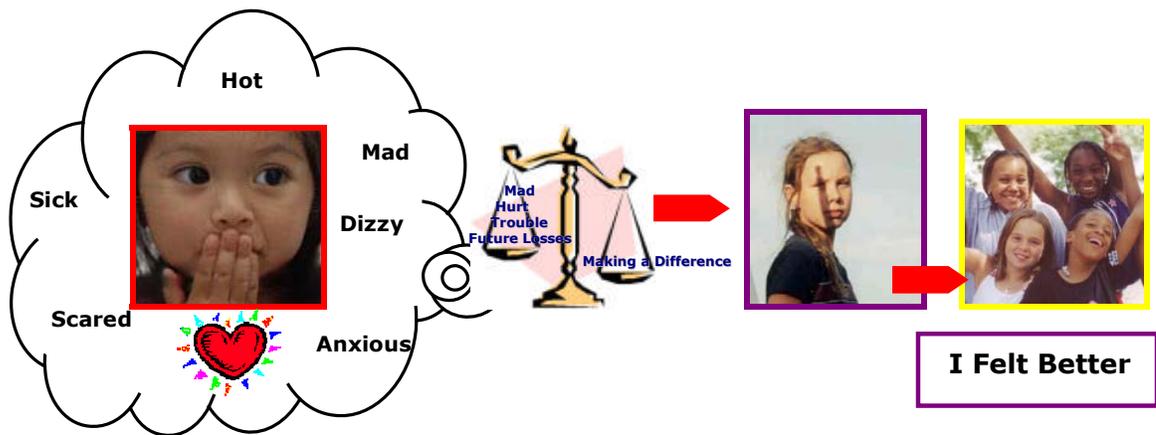


Figure 6. Theme of I Felt Better, completing the meaning structure of the Expression of Voice experience.

Felt Strongly, I Hesitated, A Lot of Feelings, What's Going to Happen, I Have to Do This, and I Felt Better formed the primary meaning structure of the Expression of Voice experience. These themes did not occur in isolation but were intimately related to one another and moved in a temporal sequence denoted by the arrow connections in the above model. Co-researchers reported their Expression of Voice experiences starting with an awareness of feeling

strongly about an issue but hesitating to speak up, characterized by emotional and physical feelings (i.e., Hot, Angry, Nervous, Dizzy), along with a related dichotomous decision-making process weighing potential losses and gains from speaking (What's Going to Happen). This decision-making process culminated in each co-researcher deciding that she needed to speak, despite a variety of potentially negative consequences. Following the voicing of their opinions or feelings, all girls reported immediately feeling better and acknowledging that speaking up under certain circumstances is vital.

#### *Impact of Participation in the Interview Process*

Each co-researcher was interviewed approximately 30 days after the existential-phenomenological interview to explore the impact that participation in the initial interview process may have had on them. Eleven of 12 co-researchers (92%) reported some impact of participating in the interview process, coming up with specific examples of the impact of participation, with one participant reporting no positive or negative effect from study participation. No negative reflections were reported and positive reflections fell into three different categories: Speaking More/Confident, Self Awareness, and Awareness of Others, with all eleven co-researchers reporting some effect and nine reporting at least two categories of impact.

Table 4. Interview Impact

<u>Impact</u>	<u>Number Reporting</u>
None	1
Speaking More/Confident	10
Self Awareness	9
Awareness of Others	3

*Speaking More/Confident.* Ten of 12 participants reported that they were Speaking More as a result of participation in the interview process and that they felt more confident and able to speak up. To this effect, Michelle stated, "Like the other day I saw this cute boy and I just thought, no, I shouldn't talk to him but then I decided to just do it. He was so nice and I was glad I did it. I finally had the nerve to say what I wanted to!" Andrea said, "I always thought I was outgoing but now I am not as afraid to talk. I mean after I thought about it, what do I have to lose? I have some confidence." Jessica noted, "During the interview, I thought there was so much more I could have said to them, I didn't realize I had held back, even then. I have to let people know what I think. I notice I talk more because after thinking about it, I have no reason to be scared."

*Self Awareness.* Nine of twelve girls reported a new awareness of their speaking and non-speaking behavior. As Ruby put it, "Why don't I speak up more often? I have a lot of pressure on me to make people happy, to be good, and I wondered why after that [interview]. Why do I care so much?" Nicki said, "It helps to think about it, to talk about what happened because then you're aware, aware of how you act, how other people act and react, you think about why, not just accepting things the way they are." Amy stated regretfully, "It really made me think and I regret all the times that I don't tell people what I think." Samantha said she was "amazed" after she realized how she acted. "I never knew I thought so much about everyone else and so little about me. Who cares? I have rights too!" Marissa related, "I have more self-awareness, I'm more conscious of myself now when I have an opinion or don't feel like I can say what I think." Riley noted, "I was more aware that I don't speak out as much as I used to after we talked. Maybe the classes [at school] got harder and I was overwhelmed. I hadn't even noticed I had changed."

*Awareness of Others.* Three co-researchers noted the non-speaking behavior of other female peers. Joanne said, "I thought about it after [we talked] and I noticed my best friend doesn't stand up for herself and now I tell her to stand up for herself. She always wanted me to tell people things for her and now I say 'no' and I tell

her to do it. I used to be the same way.” Samantha noted about her female classmates, “It’s weird to notice how a girl might have an answer, she has the answer but she wouldn’t say it so I noticed more at school how girls don’t talk much. We’re too scared.”

Eleven of 12 co-researchers noted some positive impact of participating in the interview process with ten of these eleven stating that they are speaking more and feeling more confident as a result of talking about their experiences. Nine reported an increased awareness of their own speaking and non-speaking behavior, while three noted the awareness of these behaviors in other girls. Overall, a positive impact of participation in an existential-phenomenological interview about an experience with an Expression of Voice was noted by 92% of study participants.

### *Reliability*

This researcher enlisted the help of a doctoral student colleague to thematize protocols. Both the researcher and the fellow student independently read and thematized a sample of protocols, allowing a measure of reliability. These results were compared to determine whether the themes identified were consistent across raters. This measure of reliability (i.e., percent agreement between raters) was thus obtained. The desired level of reliability for this study was .70, a level of reliability commonly used in quantitative research as a whole

(Thompson, 1996). In fact, the total interrater reliability was approximately 97% across all protocols. Additionally, a triangulation of the data occurred with data from the third interview. At this time, co-researchers were asked if their experience was fairly and accurately represented. Without exception, each co-researcher agreed that the extracted themes represented her experience. Using multiple raters contributes to the trustworthiness of the analysis of the obtained data (i.e., triangulation) and a circumvention of potential researcher biases.

### *Journals*

As stated in Chapter III, each participant was asked to journal or write down her thoughts between the time she was presented with the research question and the time she was interviewed, either in a notebook or in an online blog. This request was initially met with enthusiasm by six girls, with the remaining six stating that they “really did not have time”, were “not good at journaling”, or “did not want more homework.” Ultimately, no co-researchers actually kept journals. Four girls wrote a small amount on the experience about which they wanted to speak but did not discuss their thoughts, feelings, or reactions in their journals.

## Chapter V.

### Discussion

It is hard to decide. It's always a mental process. A whole process of deciding to talk, to not talk, who to please, how important is the issue, what will change. It's overwhelming! [So] I did a thought process and was like well, what happens if I say it? I don't know. And what happens if I don't? Well, nothing happens. So if you want to change things, change the world, then you might as well say something or you won't have any effect on anything. (Riley, age 15)

This study set out to elucidate the lived experience of the Expression of Voice in adolescent girls. In addition, this study aimed to explore the impact of participation in the interview process on participants. An existential-phenomenological interview method was used to capture the Expression of Voice phenomenon as described by 12 girls who had experienced it. Additionally, an interactive interview approach was used to investigate the effects of talking about the Expression of Voice experience in the initial Existential-Phenomenological interview.

This group of co-researchers was chosen because a review of the relevant research literature on this topic reported the presence of this phenomenon in the lives of virtually all adolescent girls (e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Kelsch, 1999; O'Reilly, 2001; Orenstein, 1994). A methodological approach that would allow for maximum insight into the emotions, cognitions, and feelings that make up the Expression of Voice experience was of extreme importance. Therefore, the existential-phenomenological approach was chosen. In fact, the use of this approach facilitated an atmosphere of safety, comfort, and impartiality in which each co-researcher openly explored the research question. The average response time used to answer the initial single, open-ended research question about each girl's experience with Expression of Voice was 37 minutes. This researcher believes that the information gathered in the interviews was candid, vivid, and revealing of the intensely lived experience of Expression of Voice.

An interactive interview approach was used to investigate the impact of participation in the previous interview about each girl's experience with Expression of Voice. Through the interactive interview approach, a safe, open, and unstructured environment was created in which girls freely shared their thoughts and reactions. The average response time to this single, open-ended research question about their experience with interview participation was 17 minutes. This

researcher believes a vivid, rich accounting of the impact of interview participation was captured.

### *Context and Demographic Impressions*

Through the analysis of the interviews, it appears that neither co-researcher's age nor racial/ethnic background had a distinguishable impact on the Experience of Voice experience. Girls of all ages in this study (i.e., 12-16 years) who were from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (see Table 1) easily recalled at least one Expression of Voice experience and described it with marked consistency. That is, the themes and their meaning structure for each protocol were extremely similar to the others as well as to those revealed by the investigator and her similarly-aged doctoral colleague in their bracketing interviews, even though there was a discernible age difference between them and the co-researchers.

In addition, regardless of the setting of the event (i.e., school, home, camp, with parents, with peers, with teachers) or the topic (i.e., standing up for oneself, defending a friend), the meaning structure was the same for all co-researchers. This suggests that the context of, or topic involved in, the experience do not seem to shape dimensions of the lived experience of Expression of Voice, although these may be important in understanding what triggers the experience. The apparent finding that the Expression of Voice experience is

fundamentally the same regardless of age, race or ethnicity, or even context or topic, is supported by the literature (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Mazarella & Pecora, 1999; Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002). As previously reported, Brown and Gilligan (1992) tracked the progress of girls from first through fourth grade and in fifth grade, seventh grade, and tenth grade. All girls studied lost ground in terms of their sense of self as they approached adolescence, a time when traditional expectations and feminine behaviors are emphasized. These researchers found that, at this time, most girls began to switch from an authentic voice to an acceptable, or “perfect girl/nice girl” voice, although all girls did have times when they expressed their authentic voice.

#### *Extracted Themes*

*Felt Strongly.* Felt Strongly, the first major theme identified in the interview transcripts, reflected an intensity of emotion about the topic or issue at hand during the experience. Each co-researcher reported powerful emotional feelings which led her, ultimately, to speak out. Each girl’s first impulse was to speak up and say what she was thinking, yet every participant, although she was experiencing intense emotions, stopped herself before she spoke honestly. Stern (1991) in her discussion about adolescent girls disavowing their true selves, reported that one girl, who had sex when she was certain did not want

to do so, refused to tell the boys her honest feelings because she feared she would upset them. Girls often avoid potentially difficult situations by not discussing their authentic feelings.

*I Hesitated.* While each co-researcher identified a variety of strong feelings and opinions regarding an issue or topic about which she wanted to speak, none of the girls chose to speak at that moment. Each girl waited, or hesitated, before expressing her thoughts and feelings. This theme aligns well with the research on voice, suggesting that girls hesitate to speak out because they place ideals such as likeability, self-sacrifice, the comfort of others, and preservation of relationships above their own needs and desires -- sometimes at great cost to themselves (Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002). While co-researchers reported intense emotions and a strong desire to speak, each chose silence, if only initially, as the safest option. This is similar to Cihonski's (2003) findings on Loss of Voice showing that girls chose not to speak up, even when they felt they "Might Explode".

*A Lot of Feelings.* During Hesitation, each co-researcher reported a variety of feelings, both physical and emotional. These were grouped into three emotional categories (Mad, Scared, and Anxious) and three physical categories (Dizzy, Hot, and Sick). When these girls did not speak their honest feelings, when they Hesitated to say what they thought, that experience was accompanied by intense

feelings. When girls do not speak up, they frequently report strong negative feelings. These feelings are well-documented in the literature (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Cihonski, 2003; Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002) and reveal the range of negative emotions girls endure while trying to maintain a sense of self while placing the needs of others above their own. Orenstein (1994) found that many girls who did not express their authentic feelings and thoughts reported a variety of adverse feelings and reactions to this position. As one girl put it, "I lack self-esteem and confidence." She went on to write in her journal that she needed "therapy and diet pills soon" and finally wrote, "I downed eight Tylenol P.M. Good. I hope I end up in a coma and die!!" (p. 85).

*What's Going to Happen?* After Hesitating, each co-researcher reported entering a decision-making process, wondering What's Going to Happen if she speaks or does not speak. Cihonski (2003) found a similar process in her study of adolescent girls who experienced a Loss of Voice. As in Cihonski's (2003) study, girls in the current study reported a decision-making process in which they weighed the consequences, both positive and negative, for speaking and for remaining silent. Girls have reported this often-complicated process of deciding if it is safe to speak up, who to please, and what to say if they

do speak, throughout the literature on voice (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Mazarella & Pecora, 1999; Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002).

*Their Reactions.* All co-researchers in this study reported that they thought they would experience a wide variety of negative consequences for saying what they thought. As co-researcher Riley stated about this “mental process” of deciding to talk or not to talk, she had to think about how many feelings she felt she had to please. This theme of considering the needs of others before speaking was noted among all participants in this study. Cihonski (2003) reported that girls did not speak up because there was “too much to lose” – the risk of loss was far too high to justify speaking up and making people mad, causing trouble, or losing the respect of others.

Further, as reported in the literature, adolescence is a time when girls are particularly vulnerable to the opinions of others, and girls often feel they are being watched or judged by an imaginary audience of people they must please (Elkind, 1967; Newman & Newman, 1999). The negative consequences girls worried about were mainly associated with the reactions they feared from people around them. These negative reactions were noted to fall into four separate groups: Mad, Hurt, Trouble, and Future Losses.

The existing literature indicates that girls often report that they do not want to make anyone mad or hurt others (e.g., Cihonski, 2003;

Pipher, 1996). Girls often go to great lengths to ensure that the people around them are comfortable, even if it means they must make costly sacrifices (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002). For example, Stern (1991) reported that one girl agreed to have sex with different boys and engaged in excessive drinking but did not voice her honest feelings because she did not want to upset anyone. Stern (1991) went on to say that although girls often have well-defined positions on important matters, they will not risk stating their honest thoughts, feelings, or opinions for fear of losing face, upsetting someone, or losing the relationship. Further, girls have reported that when wrestling with troubling dilemmas of whether to speak their true feelings or to remain silent, they have experienced headaches and nausea, had difficulty studying (Orenstein, 1994; Stern, 1991) and were more likely to experience depression and eating disorders (Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995).

Consistent with the findings of previous studies, co-researchers in this study reported a fear of causing trouble, again not wishing to negatively impact people around them (Cihonski, 2003; Stern, 1990; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Finally, girls reported that they were worried about Future Losses by speaking up. Cihonski (2003) in her study of the Loss of Voice experience in adolescent girls, found

that girls also feared future losses if they spoke their minds. As in the current study, girls in Cihonski's (2003) study worried about giving up friends, the respect of others, and opportunities if they spoke their honest thoughts and feelings and were negatively judged by others. As found in the current study, and through a review of the relevant literature on adolescents, it appears that girls are quite vulnerable to the potentially harsh and negative opinions and judgments of others (e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Corfield, 1999; French, Leffert, Story, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Stat, & Benson, 2001; Gil-Kashiwabara, 2002; Orenstein, 1994).

*Making a Difference.* Consistent with the findings of Cihonski's (2003) study, girls in the present study identified one or very few positive consequences for speaking their minds. However, girls in the current study chose to speak up, even though the number of positive consequences were far fewer than negative consequences they perceived, because they felt that they could Make a Difference. In other words, the gains for speaking up were few but highly positive in nature.

Interestingly, many participants in Cihonski's (2003) study reflected that speaking up "would not make a difference." Further, the potential positive consequences noted by Cihonski's (2003) co-researchers centered more around personal gains such as feeling

better and making themselves happy while the positive consequences in the current study focused more on Making a Difference in the situation, often regardless of personal loss or gain. Each girl in the current study reflected on the importance of the issue at hand and concluded that she could Make a Difference if she spoke up. While participants in Cihonski's (2003) study felt they would not have an impact and had too much to lose if they tried, girls in this study felt strongly enough about the issue at hand and believed that they could Make a Difference.

It appears that this belief in being able to impact the outcome of their situation was a motivating factor leading girls to speak up. Previous studies have shown that when girls are in environments in which they believe their voices matter – when they will be heard and valued and can make a difference – such as with close, trusted friends and adults, or in single-sex classrooms, they are more likely to speak up and state their honest thoughts, feelings, and opinions (e.g., Harter & Waters, 1991; Jackson, 2002; Jones, 2001).

Additionally, many girls in the current study reported that they only spoke up if they knew they were right, would be accepted by others, or had a high probability of changing the situation. Orenstein (1994) found that many girls would not answer questions in class unless they were sure they were right; girls reported that they needed

to be sure of success in order to speak out. As co-researcher Ruby stated in her interview: "I was worried [the counselor] would not care; she wouldn't listen or believe me." As co-researcher Michelle said, "I was right, knowing I was worth something after all, that someone had to listen to me." It appears that when girls believe other people will listen without judging, that they themselves are "correct," or that they can impact the situation or people around them in a positive way, they feel more empowered to speak. In addition, girls must feel strongly enough about the issue to take the risk, even with a high probability of success.

*I Have to Do This.* The fifth major theme shared by all co-researchers, and a result of the decision making process in *What's Going to Happen?*, was *I Have to Do This*. All co-researchers decided to talk after a process of reflection comparing the negative and positive consequences of speaking up or remaining silent, ultimately deciding that they had to speak up regardless of any negative consequences. In the literature on resilience, it has been reported that a sense of purpose and values appear to be protective factors that guide adolescents to engage in healthy behaviors (French, Leffert, Story, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Stat, & Benson, 2001; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodick, & Sawyer, 2003). Indeed, girls in the

current study reported that as their strong values came into play, this guided their behavior and they were compelled to speak.

*I Felt Better.* As portrayed in the name of this final superordinate theme, each co-researcher reported that she Felt Better after speaking up. While girls in previous studies reported loss of self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and even a questioning of their personal identity when they did not speak their minds (e.g., Cihonski, 2003; Jones, 2001; Orenstein, 1994, Stern, 1990), girls in the present study reported feeling strong, confident, heroic, and powerful after saying what they thought. When girls refused to take on a role of selfless silence to please the people around them and instead remained true to themselves, negative feelings about themselves were conspicuously absent.

While previous studies have reported that girls who do not speak up are often self-critical and report feelings of self-hatred, self-loathing, and regret (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Cihonski, 2003; Jackson, 2002; Orenstein, 1994; Stern, 1990), the current study found that girls who spoke up felt important and worthwhile without any regret for having said what they really thought. Many of the girls interviewed reported that they would feel badly if they did not speak up, and this awareness, for some co-researchers, served as a motivating factor to speak rather than remain silent. Samantha said, "If I didn't say it, I

might have exploded!" Amy stated, "I knew I'd hate myself forever if I didn't say it." Even while speaking up, three co-researchers said they did not feel able to be totally honest when they spoke up and wanted to say more. Although Michelle reported feeling powerful and happy after speaking up, she said that feeling she could not be totally honest was "a sad place to be." Overall, every girl in this study Felt Better after speaking and no participants reported any regrets about speaking their minds. The literature supports this link between empowering individual actions and subsequent feelings of well-being and happiness. Cocking and Drury (2004) while looking at collective social responses, found that individuals who spoke out reported feelings a strong sense of self-efficacy, power, and achievement, even when they were not successful in changing the situation in which they were involved. Other researchers have reported similar links between individually empowering behavior and feelings of happiness and well-being. Lord and Hutchison (1997) stated that when individuals reduce personal powerless and have increased control over their lives, they acquire self-confidence and self-esteem. In addition, they may begin to exhibit better problem-solving and decision-making skills (Lord, 1994). It appears that, as individuals voice their opinions and thoughts and attempt to impact their environment, they experience a

number of positive and reinforcing personal results including feeling happy, powerful, and, as Michelle put it, "heroic."

### *Structure and Meaning*

The structure of the Expression of Voice experience seems to present a temporal sequence of events. There is an initial awareness that an issue is important and that the girl Felt Strongly about it. Although wanting to speak up, each girl Hesitated to speak. This phase of Hesitation was accompanied by A Lot of Feelings: a variety of powerful emotional and physical feelings. Girls then entered a decision-making phase, where they wondered What's Going to Happen? During this time, which lasted sometimes for just a few minutes but up to two weeks in the case of one co-researcher, Joanne, girls weighed the positive and negative consequences for speaking up and for remaining silent. After examining these consequences, and regardless of a number of potentially negative consequences, each girl decided that she Had to Do This – she had to speak up. After speaking, each girl Felt Better. Girls felt powerful, happy, confident, and heroic.

As girls refuse to adopt the coping strategy of giving up the self to maintain opportunities, self-image, and relationships, they are also refusing to reinforce gender role stereotypes in themselves and others.

A comfort with Expressing Voice may lead to greater classroom participation which has been linked to better school performance (e.g., Jackson, 2002; Kelsch, 1999). Academic success and increased academic opportunities often lead to a wider variety of life options and career opportunities in adulthood (e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Pipher, 1994). Since women lacking in education tend to be viewed as incompetent and incapable (Yoder, 2002), education is of utmost importance in helping girls to become healthy, productive women who are viewed by themselves and others as competent and capable. Additionally, those with education often have the means to support themselves, avoiding poverty and dependence on others for financial well-being, and are less vulnerable to domestic violence (Yoder, 2002). Strong, educated women are at far less risk for being part of the self-perpetuating cycle of poverty. As girls and women exhibit healthy speaking-out behaviors such as assertiveness and collaborative problem solving, they model this for themselves and other girls, as well as peers and adults.

Every girl in this study reported that she Felt Strongly about an issue, and a majority of girls spoke up because it was the “right thing” to do. The Search Institute (2004) stated that adolescents who hold strong values about certain topics will use these values to guide their actions and choices. Girls reported that as their strong values came

into play, this guided their behavior. As Joanne said, "I know my religion. I didn't think it was right." Nicki said, "I was scared for her, though, and I knew I was right." Additionally, in the literature on resilience in adolescents, it has been reported that internal assets such as self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and values appear to be protective factors that buffer against unhealthy behaviors and harmful impacts in the environment (French, Leffert, Story, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Stat, & Benson, 2001; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodick, & Sawyer, 2003). As girls moved through their Hesitation accompanied by A Lot of Feelings and entered the decision-making phase of What's Going to Happen, they decided to speak up. Regardless of potentially negative or harmful reactions from the people around them and the environment, girls felt a sense of purpose, strength, and self-esteem; they could Make a Difference and so decided that they Had to Do This. After speaking up, girls said they Felt Better, and that they were able to speak up more freely, be more confident in doing so, and that they were also aware of the speaking and non-speaking behavior of themselves and girls around them.

A review of the themes extracted from interview transcripts appear to align well with the existing literature on the experiences of adolescent girls. More importantly perhaps, the results illuminate the meaning structure of the lived experience of Expression of Voice,

which has not been reported previously in the literature. This model of the lived experience offers compelling insight into the powerful emotions and sensations of girls experiencing an Expression of Voice event. It can be hypothesized that this meaning structure of the Expression of Voice experience in adolescent girls reveals the essence, or core experience, of the Expression of Voice. This speculation is supported by the fact that variables of age, race, ethnicity, context, and topic failed to demonstrate any disparity in aspects of the experience. A comparison of the themes from the bracketed interviews of the lead investigator, her doctoral colleague, and the 12 co-researchers showed great overlap. Since extensive effort was made during data collection and analysis to ensure that the experiences of the researcher were not imposed on those of the co-researchers, this outcome can be viewed as evidence that the experience of Expression of Voice is commonly shared. It could be argued that this sharing of themes among all interviews was due to investigator bias. However, the interrater reliability of 97% between two independent thematizers would suggest that the extracted themes reflect the words and experiences of the co-researchers and not those imposed by the lead investigator. Further, the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, allowing the investigator and her doctoral colleague to review the interviewer's comments and questions to determine

whether she was leading the interviewee or otherwise inappropriately re-phrasing co-researchers' words. Neither of these occurred, further suggesting that adequate "bracketing" was used during the interview and analysis processes.

### *Impact of Participation in the Interview Process*

Each co-researcher was interviewed approximately 30 days after the existential-phenomenological interview to explore the impact that participation in the initial interview process may have had on her. Each participant was encouraged to give details of her thoughts and experiences since the initial interview so that this study could elucidate the viewpoints and experiences of these girls (see Rodriguez, 1998). Although there is a paucity of research on the impact of interview participation, the findings of the current study are consistent with Oakley's (1981) findings. The majority of the co-researchers (92%) in this study reported some positive impact of participating in the interview process. One participant reported neither positive nor negative effects from study participation, and no co-researchers reported any negative impact from participation in the interview process. Reports of positive impacts were grouped into three separate categories: Speaking More/Confident, Self Awareness, and Awareness of Others.

Cihonski (2003) interviewed adolescent girls about a time when they experienced a Loss of Voice and did not speak up about an important issue. This study found that, after speaking with the interviewer about their experiences, many girls were talking more and reported being less afraid to speak up. The co-researchers in the current study also reported this beneficial effect of participation in the interview process. Additionally, the girls became more aware of their own speaking and non-speaking behavior as well as that of other girls.

Oakley (1981) reported that participants in her study of expectant mothers reflected more on their experiences after talking. This is consistent with the reports of girls in the current study who felt that by talking about their experiences with Expression of Voice, they were more aware of their own experiences and behaviors. Further, there was a normalization of the experience of speaking up or finding it difficult to speak up as study participants reported being more aware of speaking and non-speaking behaviors in other girls. This “normalization” of the experience under investigation was reported by both Cihonski (2003) and Oakley (1981).

Importantly, since girls often report feeling anxious and “different” from others during Loss and Expression of Voice experiences (Cihonski, 2003; Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Hart & Thompson, 1996; Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002) participation in an

interview about Expression of Voice appears to offer many positive benefits for girls, including more confidence to speak up, an increase in talking behavior, a normalization of their experiences, a decrease in anxiety about speaking up, and an awareness of speaking and non-speaking behavior in themselves and others.

### *Journals*

As previously stated, each participant was asked to write down or journal her thoughts between the time she was presented with the research question and the time she was interviewed, either in a notebook or in an online blog. While some participants seemed enthusiastic about this activity, six girls were hesitant about journaling stating that they “really did not have time”, were “not good at journaling”, or “did not want more homework.” Ultimately, no co-researchers actually kept journals. Four co-researchers wrote short anecdotal entries about what took place during the experience about which they wanted to speak but did not discuss their thoughts, feelings, or reactions in their journals. Several possible reasons for this lack of response were considered. First, although the investigator initially presented the journaling as an important part of the study, she may have made it sound optional to any co-researchers who were resistant. Second, some girls simply did not want to journal as previously stated. Third, the experience of speaking up was often

characterized by intense emotion. Perhaps the participants found contemplating the journaling of the event to be aversive for this reason.

### *Limitations*

The research topic for this study considered the meaning of the Expression of Voice experience in adolescent girls. To minimize limitations, great care must be taken when completing a qualitative research study using an existential-phenomenological approach (e.g., Becker, 1992; Moustakas, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1989). The investigator must establish an awareness of her or his own thoughts and perceptions about the experience under investigation to reduce the imposition of researcher subjectivity during data collection and analysis. Although tremendous care was taken during the course of this study to implement an objective data collection and analysis process, it is possible that researcher subjectivity may have impacted these processes in some way.

Interview studies are subject to certain limitations (Oakley, 1981; Samdahl, 1991; Scott & Godbey, 1990). For example, Mittelstaedt (1996) reporting on the strengths and limitations of the interview method, reported that some interviewees reported that what they said "came out all wrong." Since no girls in this study corrected or changed their interview transcript, it is possible that although each

girl reviewed her interview protocol and had the chance to change what she had said, clarify her thoughts, and give feedback she may not have wanted to assert herself and correct her transcript for a variety of reasons. For example, girls may have feared being judged as indecisive, may not have wanted to make the study more difficult, might have worried about upsetting the researcher, or may not have wanted to share her truest feelings.

Additionally, Mittelstaedt's (1996) interviews were tape-recorded, as in the present study. As in Mittelstaedt's (1996) study, girls in this study may have felt uncomfortable with the physical presence of a tape recorder. Additionally, girls may have had some difficulties with memory or recall due to the stress of situation or the adverse and emotional nature of the events they were recalling and relating.

This researcher also found a qualitative difference in some younger co-researchers' willingness or ability to verbalize their experiences. While some interviews lasted longer than the average length of 37 minutes (63 minutes in one case), others lasted a much shorter amount of time, with the shortest being 18 minutes. As expected, longer interviews yielded a greater number of bracketed items for each theme due to length and density of information given by each girl. Notably, these shorter interviews occurred with younger

participants while older participants tended to speak at greater length about their experiences. This difference in length and quality may also have been due to a greater number of Expressions of Voice experienced by older participants. By having more experiences with Expression of Voice, older girls may have had more time to process these experiences and had much more to say about them in general.

Generalization of results to a larger population is one common goal of traditional research studies. However, the ability to generalize results is not a focus of existential-phenomenological research. Rather the goal is to “provide sufficient enough detail so a reader can connect and understand the experience” (Seidman, 1994). In this study of Expression of Voice, the shared themes extracted and their derived meaning structure may help to create an understanding of the meaning of the Expression of Voice experience. Further, this investigator believes that the model presented (Figure 6) has the potential to represent a universal model of the Expression of Voice experience in adolescent girls. This universal representation embodies generalization, i.e., the model may essentially be the same for every girl who has the experience of an Expression of Voice.

#### *Future Directions, Purpose, and Summary*

This study, unlike other studies, both qualitative and quantitative, focused not on the “cause” of the Expression of Voice

experience, but rather on cognitions, emotions, and sensations contained in the experience itself. Further, while research on the Expression of Voice in adolescent girls has traditionally focused on the comparison of scores on standardized measures, such as self-esteem and depression rating scales, especially by comparing male and female adolescents (Marshall & Arvay, 1999), this study provides a rich and detailed description of the meaning, essence, and structure of the lived Expression of Voice experience, thereby filling a void in the literature.

It is hoped that future research will build upon the results of the present study, given that Loss of Voice is a common phenomenon thought to contribute significantly to a lack of quality and opportunity throughout life while Expression of Voice is less common in adolescents and is linked to success in the classroom and in life (Jackson, 2002; Jones, 2001; Kelsch, 1999). Further, there is a need for further qualitative research in this area so that the detailed experiences of girls can be captured more fully, including information such as the context of the experience and what made girls feel comfortable speaking up. The data gathered in the current study can be practically applied in several ways. There is very little information on prevention or remediation of Loss of Voice in the literature as well as a lack of information on what helps girls speak up. For example, there is little information available on what factors are present (i.e.,

strong feelings or values, a supportive environment, etc.) in an Expression of Voice experience. The use of the present data in initiation of programs to help girls speak honestly and say what they think would be a highly practical application. Programs for young girls to help them retain their voices and also remediation programs that will help older girls find and use their authentic voices again - and learn to speak confidently and without fear - would be highly relevant uses of the present research information.

Most girls reported intense feelings and emotional reactions during their Expression of Voice experiences, and all girls Felt Better after speaking and reported no regrets for having done so. This feeling of empowerment after speaking, along with a new awareness about their own non-speaking and speaking behavior after participating in the initial interview, may help girls be less vulnerable to future Losses of Voice.

An effective cognitive-behavioral intervention and prevention plan using an experiential approach can be formulated from the lived experiences reported in this study. Cash (1997), based on his research on body image problems in women and girls, created an 8-step workbook-based program for girls and women to help them improve their body image. The workbook contains many tests, worksheets, and learning activities to help girls and women with such

issues as becoming aware of the negative messages they receive each day, negative or harmful self-talk, and questioning societal ideals of appropriate behavior and the “perfect” girl or woman. Further, programs using information from the “lived experience” may be much more effective in the promotion of Expressions of Voice and prevention and treatment of phenomena such as Loss of Voice (Piran, Levine, & Steiner-Adair, 1999). Data from this study can be presented to girls in a therapeutic environment, such as a girls’ discussion group or in one-on-one counseling, allowing girls to examine openly their Expression and Loss of Voice experiences and make choices and changes in their lives. Further, these data offer a guide to the thoughts and behaviors that may be targeted for therapeutic intervention. Girls may benefit from specific techniques such as role playing and dialoguing that allow them to express their authentic thoughts and feelings. Social skills training should be modified to accommodate the different needs of girls. Girls are not likely to benefit from social skills training, often targeted at boys, that teaches silence and accommodating behaviors. Rather, girls would likely benefit from training that builds skills in assertiveness and speaking up for oneself.

Since many girls undergo a change in attributional style during adolescence and they begin not to trust their own judgments and lose the ability to tolerate frustration without becoming overwhelmed

(Pipher, 1994), girls would likely benefit from attribution training. Additionally, instruction should include positive self-talk and problem-solving skills to help girls cope with unrealistic self-blame and self-loathing, fears of being judged, or taking responsibility for the thoughts and behaviors others. These data may also be useful for the development of policy or a curriculum promoting an egalitarian learning environment in schools – one that embraces girls’ authentic voices and experiences. This curriculum would help teachers and school personnel become aware of the needs of girls and would promote female role models, embrace the voices and experiences of all students, and give fair consideration to the special needs of girls who are growing up in a society that demands selflessness and unattainable beauty standards for women.

Another consideration worthy of mention is the impact on voice that 92% of all study participants found after taking part in this study’s interview process. Several co-researchers said they realized after talking about their Expression of Voice experience with the investigator that they were much more likely to talk and felt more confident in doing so. Oakley (1981) interviewed expectant mothers and said that these interviewees often reported a “therapeutic effect of talking: getting it out of your system” (p. 50). These women said that being interviewed had impacted them in several ways, including

leading them to reflect on their experience after talking about it, reducing their level of anxiety and normalizing their experience, and giving a valuable outlet for expression of feelings. Since feelings of anxiety and being “different from others” are pervasive in the Loss of Voice experience (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Hart & Thompson, 1996; Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002), it is thought that talking about experiences with Voice and the Expression of Voice benefited the co-researchers. Future research may expand on the impact of open-ended interviewing and potential therapeutic effects.

Further, as the girls in this study experienced positive feelings when they spoke up, there is need for greater clarity around the concept of resilience as it relates to this period of adolescence in girls (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003; Search Institute, 2004). Greater conceptual clarity regarding resilience and protective factors may be used to guide development of a range of tailored interventions that benefit girls of all ages.

Finally, a survey or scale may be developed to confirm the incidence and intensity of the Expression of Voice experience in the larger, general population. The themes and subthemes reported herein can be used to generate a pool of items for a survey that may be useful in both educational and clinical settings to help sensitize girls

to their own speaking and non-speaking behavior as well as facilitating traditional generalization.

In summary, evidence has shown that girls receive an unclear and impossible-to-achieve image of the ideal female through the media, their peers, adults, and society. Trying to live up to this vague and unattainable standard -- one that tells girls to be smart but not too smart, painfully thin yet voluptuous, sexy but pristine -- puts girls at risk for a wide variety of social and psychological problems. Girls, faced with such standards, often find that the only safe strategy is to dumb down and shut up. However, girls often show remarkable resilience when they feel strongly enough about an issue or topic (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003; Search Institute, 2004) and believe that speaking up is the "right thing" to do.

Girls interviewed for this study refused to be quiet about an issue or issues important to them, even when speaking up is not something they usually do. This investigator believes that the data presented here capture information central to understanding the lives and viewpoints of girls, useful for furthering policy, curricular, and therapeutic changes necessary for the well-being of all girls and the women they will become.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

### Research Questions

This research study will use two interview formats.

The first interview will be based on the existential-phenomenological method. This method involves using an open-ended question that elicits a detailed description of the experience under investigation. In this study, female adolescents' experiences with Expression of Voice will be examined.

The specific initial interview question will be:

"Please think of a specific time when you had something important to say, and although it was difficult, you did speak up and say what you thought. In as much detail as possible, describe that experience."

The second interview will be based on the interactive interview method. This method involves using open-ended questions to elicit detailed descriptions of the experience under investigation. In this study, female adolescents' experiences with the interview process itself will be examined.

The specific interview question will be:

"Do you feel that being involved in this research – my coming to see you – has affected your thoughts, beliefs, or experiences with speaking up and expressing your voice?"

Appendix B

Demographic Data Sheet

1. What is your name? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What grade are you in? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your race/ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What groups, sports, or activities are you involved in?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your favorite class(es)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C  
Informed Consent/Assent

**Parental Informed Consent**

Social and Behavioral Sciences  
University of South Florida

**Information for People Whose Children Are Being Asked to Take Part in a Research Study**

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The following information is being presented to help you decide whether or not you want to allow your child to be a part of a minimal risk research study. Please read this carefully. If you do not understand anything, ask the person in charge of the study.

**Title of research study:** FINDING MY VOICE: ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EXPERIENCES WITH SPEAKING UP AND HOW RECOUNTING THESE EXPERIENCES IMPACTS FUTURE EXPRESSION

**Person in charge of study:** Deborah Cihonski, Ed.S.

**Where the study will be done:** Interviews conducted at the location of your choice.

**Your child is being asked to participate because** she has reported an experience of expression of voice and can provide an account of her personal experience with the phenomenon.

General Information about the Research Study

The purpose of this research study is to gain insight into the experience of the expression of voice from a female adolescent's perspective. Further, this study also seeks to gain insight into the possible impact of talking about voice and the expression of voice.

## Appendix C (continued)

### Plan of Study

These interviews will occur in four short sessions of approximately 30 minutes each at a location of your choice. The total time required is approximately 2.5 hours. All interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed and destroyed at the study's completion.

### Payment for Participation

Your daughter will receive a \$5.00 gift certificate to a local movie theater for her participation.

### Benefits of Taking Part in this Research Study

Your daughter may benefit from sharing her experience with a supportive adult (i.e., a trained School Psychologist), however, Ms. Cihonski's role in this investigation is not therapeutic.

### Risks of Being a Part of this Research Study

Your daughter may experience mild emotional distress during her interviews. She has the right to discontinue the interviews at any time without penalty and will be provided with follow-up information.

### Confidentiality of Your Child's Records

You and your child's privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the full extent required by law. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, and the USF Institutional Review Board may inspect the records from this research project.

The results of this study may be published. However, the data obtained from your child will be combined with data from other children in the publication. The published results will not include your child's name or any other information that would personally identify your child in any way.

Your daughter's identity will be protected and all matters of confidentiality provided. The thoughts your daughter shares during

Appendix C (continued)

this interview process will not be identifiable by name. Only the researcher, Deborah A. Cihonski, Ed.S., will have ownership of the

audiotapes or transcriptions. Ms. Cihonski retains the right to share portions of the audiotapes or transcriptions (which will be identified by an assigned number) with her advising doctoral committee members. Authorized personnel, employees of the department of Health and Human Services and the USF Institutional Review Board may inspect the records from this research project

Volunteering to Take Part in this Research Study

Your decision to allow your child to participate in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to allow your child to participate in this research study or to withdraw him/her at any time. If you choose not to allow your child to participate or if you remove your child from the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits that you or your child are entitled to receive and you and your child will be provided with follow-up information.

Questions and Contacts

- If you have any questions about this research study, contact: Deborah A. Cihonski, #(813)866-5447 or her Faculty Advisors: Linda Raffaele Mendez at #(813)974-1255, or Harold Keller at #(813)974-3246
- If you have questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in a research study, you may contact the Division of Research Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-5638.

Consent for Child to Take Part in this Research Study

**I freely give my consent to let my child take part in this study. I understand that this is research. I have received a copy of this consent form.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent  
of child taking part in study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Appendix C (continued)

Investigator Statement

I have carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above protocol. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the subject signing this consent form understands the nature, demands, risks, and benefits involved in participating in this study.

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Signature of Investigator  
Or authorized research  
investigator designated by  
the Principal Investigator

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Printed Name of Investigator Date

Appendix C (continued)

Child's Assent Statement

Deborah Cihonski has explained to me this research study called FINDING MY VOICE: ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EXPERIENCES WITH SPEAKING UP AND HOW RECOUNTING THESE EXPERIENCES IMPACTS FUTURE EXPRESSION.

I agree to take part in this study.

_____ Signature of Child taking part in study	_____ Printed Name of Child	_____ Date
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_____ Signature of Parent of child taking part in study	_____ Printed Name of Parent	_____ Date
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_____ Signature of person obtaining consent	_____ Printed Name of person obtaining consent	_____ Date
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_____ [Optional] Signature of Witness	_____ Printed Name of Witness	_____ Date
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If child is unable to give assent, please explain the reasons here:

_____ Signature of Parent of child taking part in study	_____ Printed Name of Parent	_____ Date
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_____ Signature of person obtaining consent	_____ Printed Name of person obtaining consent	_____ Date
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_____ [Optional] Signature of Witness	_____ Printed Name of Witness	_____ Date
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## Appendix D

### Thematic Analysis

- A. Read the transcription in its Entirety
- B. Mark Off Tentative Thematic Units
  - a. Identify "units of significant meaning" avoiding transition words <Bracket>
- I. Chart Tentative Thematic Units
  - a. Write units on a different piece of paper grouping them by "what fits together"
- II. Clustering the Units
  - a. Connect – chart the units by linking similar units together
  - b. Check – check the chart against marked transcriptions for any missing units
  - c. Group – group the themes that seem to "hold together"
  - d. Number – number the themes on the chart and in the transcript as well
  - e. Name – name the themes according to "sorting factors" – preserve the co-researchers' words
- III. Tally
- IV. Summary
  - a. Summarize the speaker's experience
- V. Determine Reliability
  - a. Compute the percentage of total agreement between two thematizers  
(Polkinghorne noted that a measure of reliability is determined when the researcher "checks back" with the co-researchers to make sure their expressions were captured fairly and accurately).
- VI. Consider Superordinate Structures
  - a. A certain set of themes that occur across interviews

## Appendix E

### Field Notes

01/26/04 Bracketing interview

My research colleague and I have built a strong base of trust through work on our theses, in school, and as friends. We worked together on the Loss of Voice study and both have had many experiences with Loss and Expression of Voice. Talking about it again was interesting and it is always an enjoyable and enlightening to hear about her life experiences. Again, I was struck by the similarities in our experiences although they occurred in very different contexts and with different people.

02/16/04

The first interview. This girl was so eager to talk but was also nervous, wondering what I "wanted" her to say. Such a bright and inspiring girl! She appears to be very strong and knows what she thinks and yet she is so concerned about pleasing others and being careful not to offend or upset anyone. This was a long and powerful interview. I was concerned that girls might not have as much to say about speaking up as they did about remaining silent. So far, this is definitely not the case.

02/25/04

She was so interested in my study! Her Mom, also a graduate student, had really gotten her excited. She seemed wise beyond her years and was concerned about the president , Iraq... was I that worldly at 13? I doubt it. She is firm about her beliefs but she is so worried about upsetting anyone. She said it isn't right to upset anyone or make them mad. She did finally conclude that it's sometimes necessary to put your views out there. Speaking up, to her, was "like a picture of flower that took a lot more work than what it looked like." I'll have to find that exact quote. We concluded this interview with her asking me what I thought about people going against the president. Of course I let her come to her own conclusions but these interviews can get sticky. I'm glad I know her Mom!

03/02/04

Third interview. This girl said of her experience that she didn't want to get involved. Such disconnection for someone so young. It's hard to believe she's only 12. Sometimes she sounds more like a woman in her 20's but then her age really shows at other times. She had a lot to say. Another long and intense interview.

03/10/04

This girl seemed guarded. I don't think she ever let her guard down with me, although her experience was very similar to everyone else's. She had so much to share and I think this interview would have been very rich if I had been able to get to know her a little better. At 16 years, she was very articulate so, although it could have gone better, it was still a very good interview. I wish she had been more comfortable.

03/14/04

Completed two interviews tonight. It was difficult not to interrupt and counsel – or at least offer resources to one girl. I am getting better and better at getting girls to elaborate, and I am happy that our interviews are becoming more and more like conversations. They flow and I notice the girls tonight were very comfortable sharing and laughing, even thought they told me some pretty emotional things. One thing I noticed tonight was that every girl so far has told me how strong and how good she felt after she said what she thought. Go girls!

03/31/04

These interviews are getting easier and I am being very careful to not reinforce the themes I am already noticing: Girls are reporting such strong feelings and having to think so hard about who to please and what to say before they actually say anything. Keeping the girls on-track is fairly easy – I must be getting better at interviewing, or maybe it's the topic. Again, the girls seem to like giving lots of detail and contextual information. I let the girls talk and ramble a bit but I try to help them focus more on their experience. Today I interviewed a fascinating 14 year-old. She was such a strong girl with a well-developed sense of what was right and wrong in her world. She was very sensitive to other people but she says she speaks up for herself often, and I believe it. Her awareness of the cruel behaviors girls perpetuate on each other was informative and touching to me. I also interviewed another girl today. She seems so angry but fragile and aware of all

the expectations placed on her to be good and do what she is supposed to do which, to her, meant putting up with being picked on by other kids. These girls will sacrifice so much just to avoid the possibility of causing trouble. Also, I interview another girl who had a very hard time staying on-task and wanted to tell me all about the rude boys at school and why it isn't safe to stand up for yourself. I did get her to focus on when she DID speak up but she clearly spends more time not saying what she thinks. I am looking forward to talking with her about the impact of talking with me this time. I wonder if it will make any difference to her...

04/03/04

A marathon day. Completed the last 4 interviews. I was lucky to schedule them together but it was also exhausting. I feel like I am becoming a real pro and things seem so natural now. The girls are funny and ask me all sorts of personal questions after the interviews. Two of these girls were angry after they realized that speaking up is so difficult for them. I wonder what will come up in the third interview. Will they just forget this grit and determination or will it linger and make any difference?

04/17/03

Transcribing the tapes had again been a chore! It was enjoyable to listen to the girls' words again and to put them to paper myself. Patterns are emerging and re-emerging. My bracketing partner and fellow graduate student has reported that the interviews are powerful and hopeful although the girls' words sometimes make us very sad. My research partner has adolescent daughters so she can really relate to what all these girls are going through.

## About the Author

Deborah Cihonski was born and raised near Chicago, IL. She earned a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Indiana University in 1993, an Ed.S. degree in School Psychology from USF in 2003, and a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies in 2004. Ms. Cihonski became a Nationally Certified School Psychologist in 2005. She began teaching for the Department of Psychological and Social Foundations in 2000 and continued throughout her Ph.D. studies at USF.

While earning her Ph.D., Ms. Cihonski completed a 2000-hour internship as well as a variety of practicum and consulting experiences. She has been active in the Tampa community, working with adolescent girls as part of the non-profit Ophelia Project. She also consulted with the USF Banyan Family Center in special needs adoptions involving academic and behavioral difficulties, worked with the Positive Behavior Support Project at USF, and was recognized as a Mentor by the Tampa-based Children's Cancer Center.