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Lack of Voice as a Manifestation of False Self-Behavior Among Adolescents: The School Setting as a Stage Upon Which the Drama of Authenticity is Enacted

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Self-development during adolescence is characterized by increasing differentiation across roles as well as an intensification in displays of false self-behavior. A major manifestation of false self-behavior involves not saying what one thinks or believes, not expressing one's opinion. Gilligan has referred to this phenomenon as lack of "voice." It is her contention that this becomes very problematic for girls when they enter adolescence because social factors conspire to cause them to lose their voices. In this article we first review Gilligan's arguments. We then turn to a consideration of factors both within, and outside of, the school environment that might also contribute to lower levels of voice for female adolescents. The educational system has come under major scrutiny in recent years for shortchanging girls, particularly with regard to liabilities that cause them to compromise the self. However, there are limitations in the literature on both voice and gender bias, in that links between the potential causes of lack of voice have not been documented through conventional research methodologies. Nor has the field been sufficiently concerned with individual differences within gender. We review findings from our own laboratory on lack of voice, revealing that marked individual differences within gender can be explained by gender orientation (rather than gender, per se) as well as support for voice from significant others. The liabilities of not expressing one's opinion are also considered. We conclude with cautions against making generalizations about gender differences in voice, and discuss certain educational implications for enhancing the levels of voice for both genders.

The period of adolescence presents critical challenges to the development of a coherent, consolidated sense of self that mirrors one's authentic experiences. The need to create multiple selves represents a major challenge in this regard. Socialization pressures to develop different selves across different contexts (see Erikson, 1950, 1968; Grotevant & Cooper, 1983, 1986; Hill & Lynch, 1986; Rosenberg, 1986) as well as cognitive-developmental advances that promote greater differentiation (Fischer, 1980; Harter, 1990, in press; Harter & Monsour, 1992; Keating, 1990) conspire to produce a proliferation of role-related selves. Thus, the adolescent may display different selves with father, mother, close friends, romantic partners, and peers, as well as don different persona in the roles of student, athlete, and worker on the job (see Erikson, 1950; Griffin, Chassin, & Young, 1981; Harter & Monsour, 1992; Kolligian, 1990; Smollar & Youniss, 1985).

This proliferation of selves naturally introduces concern over which is "the real me," particularly if attributes in different roles appear contradictory, and if one's multiple selves do not speak with a single voice. In our own research (Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996; Harter & Monsour, 1992) we became alerted to such concerns within the context of studies in which adolescents described potentially contradictory attributes in different roles, (e.g., depressed with parents but rowdy with peers, or comfortable with close friends but self-conscious on a date). The seeming inconsistency of such attributes caused many adolescents to question, if not agonize about, which attributes represent their true selves and which represent false self-behavior (see also Broughton, 1981; Selman, 1980). Pipher (1994), writing in the more popular press, focused on this phenomenon in girls, contending that "Wholeness is shattered by the chaos of adolescence. Girls become fragmented, their selves split into mysterious contradictions" (p. 20). Gergen (1991) echoed this theme more generally in describing how adults of both genders in contemporary society are split into a multiplicity of...
self-investments that lead to a cacophony of potential selves across different relational contexts. He argued that the need to craft multiple selves, each of which must conform to the particular relationship at hand, leads individuals to question the authenticity of their behavior and whether there is any core, obdurate true self.

Self-presentation through the use of language stands out as a major vehicle through which false self-behaviors, those perceived to be lacking in authenticity, are displayed. For example, in our own research we asked adolescents to describe the meaning of the terms true and false self-behavior (Harter et al., 1996; Ng, 1993). Participants provided general descriptions; for example, the true self is the “real me inside,” “my true feelings,” “what I really think and feel,” whereas the false self is described as “being phony,” “putting on an act.” However, at a more specific level, adolescents typically described the verbal behavior through which their true and false selves are manifest. They defined true self-behavior as “saying what you really think,” “expressing your true opinion.” In contrast, false self-behaviors include “not saying what you think,” “expressing things you don’t really believe or feel,” “not stating your true opinion,” and “saying what you think other people want to hear.”

These observations converge with what Gilligan and colleagues (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 1993; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hamner, 1989; Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991) referred to as loss of voice, namely the suppression of one’s thoughts and opinions. From a developmental perspective, Gilligan has claimed that loss of voice is particularly problematic for female adolescents. She has contended that prior to adolescence, girls seem to be clear about what they know as children, suppress their voices, diminishing themselves, and hiding their feelings in a cartography of lies.

The astute, outspoken and clear-eyed resister often gets lost in a sudden disjunction or chasm as she approaches adolescence, as if the world that she knows from experience in childhood suddenly comes to an end, and divides from the world she is to enter as a young woman, a world that is governed by different rules. (Gilligan et al., 1989, p. 3)

Many years earlier, Simone de Beauvoir (1952) made a similar point in observing that “Young girls slowly bury their childhood, put away their independent and imperious selves, and submissively enter adult existence” (p. 358).

In this article we first review Gilligan’s analysis of the reasons why girls may lose their voice at adolescence. We then address the issue of lack of voice within the school setting, in particular. We review recent contentions by Sadker and Sadker (1994), the American Association of University Women (AAUW; 1992), Orenstein (1994), and others that our schools are shortchanging girls, beginning in the elementary school years, long before adolescence. Many of the factors identified by those within the educational literature have direct implications for why girls might have lower levels of voice than boys. However, there are weaknesses in this literature, in that links between classroom practices and outcomes such as lack of confidence and voice have not been demonstrated, nor have investigators addressed the marked individual differences in such outcomes among girls and boys. Moreover, there has been insufficient attention to the issue of what children bring to the classroom experience. The educational literature bearing on these topics is reviewed, as are relevant findings in the gender difference literature that suggest why factors outside the school setting may generalize to behaviors involving voice within the classroom.

It is important to emphasize that in the past literature, there has been no systematic documentation that girls actually have lower levels of voice than do boys. Moreover, although there has been documentation of gender differences on average for a number of variables that may impact voice, there has been far too little emphasis on the tremendous overlap in the distributions of boys and girls, even when differences that may be implicated in level of voice are statistically significant. Nor have theorists, educational observers, and investigators been sufficiently concerned with the potential causes and consequences of the notable individual differences within each gender. Our own findings on level of voice revealed that such individual differences represent the major phenomena to be explained. Thus, whereas some adolescent girls lack voice, there are many who report that they are quite capable of expressing their opinions. The same is true for adolescent males. In our own research, we documented two variables that impact level of voice, gender orientation (particularly for girls) and the degree to which support for voice influences adolescents’ expression of their opinions. We conclude with cautions against making sweeping generalizations about gender differences in voice, and discuss certain educational implications for enhancing the levels of voice for both genders.

GILLIGAN’S ANALYSIS OF THE
MOTIVES FOR LOSS OF VOICE AMONG
FEMALE ADOLESCENTS

Why, according to Gilligan, should adolescent females be particularly vulnerable to loss of voice? For Gilligan, during the developmental transition to adolescence, girls begin to identify with the role of women in the culture because the onset of puberty makes this impending role more salient (Gilligan, 1993). Gilligan has argued that teenage girls quickly perceive that the desirable stereotype of the “good woman” is being nice, polite, pleasing to others, unassertive, and quiet. For Gilligan, this juncture creates a conflict for female adolescents. For girls to remain faithful to themselves,
they must resist the conventions of feminine goodness. However, for girls to remain responsive to others, they must resist the values placed on self-sufficiency and self-authenticity. Pipher (1994) has concurred, observing that adolescent girls “experience a conflict between their autonomous selves and their need to be feminine, between their status as human beings and their vocation as females” (pp. 21–22). She has contended that girls become “female impersonators” who “fit their whole selves into small, crowded spaces. Vibrant, confident girls become shy, doubting young women. Girls stop thinking, ‘Who am I? What do I want?’ and start thinking, ‘What must I do to please others?’ ” (p. 22). As de Beauvoir (1952) put it, girls who were the subjects of their own lives become the objects of others’ lives. Alice Miller (1981) described a similar pattern of conflict for girls between being authentic and honest or being loved. If they choose authenticity, they are often abandoned by parents. If they choose to be loved, they abandon their true selves. Pipher described a similar conflict within the peer arena, in which she noted that “girls can be true to themselves and risk abandonment by their peers, or they can reject their true selves and be socially acceptable” (p. 38). We return to the issue of how common such reactions may be among contemporary adolescent females.

Thus, adherence to the good woman stereotype, putting others’ needs and desires ahead of one’s own, has been argued to be a powerful motive for suppressing one’s voice. Gilligan has also contended that in what is still largely a patriarchal society, girls observe that women’s opinions are typically not sought after, not valued, and not supported; they notice that the “civilized world” is not equally responsive to the views of men and women. The message to women, Gilligan has noted, is to keep quiet, notice the absence of women, and say nothing. Moreover, adolescent girls are subjected to what Gilligan (1993) has identified as societal “voice and ear training” in which it becomes clear what voices people want to hear, and what can and cannot be said to avoid being labelled as inappropriate, rude, or wrong. If girls adhere to such training and attempt to emulate the stereotype, their own voices necessarily go underground. Gilligan has also claimed that many girls observe these stereotypic behaviors in their own mothers who serve as role models for how women in this culture should act. To the extent that their mothers have endorsed the stereotype and therefore are suppressing their own thoughts and feelings, adolescent girls emulate their mothers and come to not speak their minds.

In addition, Gilligan has described a constellation of more proximal motives that derive from what she describes as the relational impasse in which many adolescent girls find themselves (Gilligan, 1993). Given the importance for girls of connectedness to others (see Belenky, Clinch, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Chodorow, 1989; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986; Rubin, 1985), behaviors that threaten relationships are to be avoided at all costs. Thus, beginning in adolescence, many girls compromise their authenticity, they take themselves out of “true” relationships, to preserve connectedness in some lesser form. If they were to speak their minds, express their true voices, it may well cause tension or conflict in the relationship, it might anger the other person, it could hurt the other’s feelings, and, at worst, it may lead the other to reject or abandon them altogether. For Gilligan, girls experience this relational impasse as a dilemma involving each of these concerns, which in turn provoke conflict and distress.

There is an even more pernicious outcome of the systematic suppression of one’s voice for some girls, according to Gilligan (1993). In the early stages, adolescent girls may mask their true opinions, but still know what they think. However, after an extended period of such suppression, eventually they come to not know their own minds, reporting that they no longer even have an opinion. That is, they dissociate, in Gilligan’s terms, from what they know, they come to lose touch with the reality of their own experiences such that they no longer even know or recognize their true selves. Thus, there is not only dissociation from others, in taking oneself out of a genuine relationship, but dissociation from one’s authentic self.

Gilligan’s analysis converges with the observations of other women scholars who have spoken to the potential for false self-behavior within relationships (see Chodorow, 1989; Jordan, 1991; Lerner, 1993; Miller, 1986). They have argued that genuine relatedness with others brings clarity, reality, and authenticity to the self. However, an overemphasis on caregiving and on pleasing others may jeopardize authenticity and the development of one’s true self. For example, those women who adopt a position of subordination in relationships typically transform their own needs, seeing others’ needs as their own. As Miller (1986) cogently argued, subordination and authenticity are totally incompatible. There is increasing convergence in the literature (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 1989; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Lerner, 1993; Miller, 1986; Stiver & Miller, 1988) that such women are fearful that if they were to act on their own needs and desires, such an expression of their true self would cause conflict and threaten the relationship.

These scholars have also concurred that there are definite liabilities to the suppression of oneself within relationships. These include loss of zest, energy, and love of life, and the increasing tendency to display depressive symptomatology. Self-esteem is also negatively affected. As Pipher (1994) has observed, self-esteem is based on the acceptance of one’s thoughts and feelings as one’s own. Thus, self-esteem and confidence will become eroded if girls “disown” themselves. In our own work, we have empirically demonstrated with both adolescents (Harter, Marold et al., 1996) and adults (Harter, Waters, Pettit et al., in press) that those who acknowledge high levels of false self-behavior also report a constellation of reactions that includes depressed affect, hopelessness, and low self-esteem.

Gilligan’s analysis is quite provocative, and represents a very plausible account of the dilemma confronting many
adolescent girls at this particular developmental juncture. Her observations, including extensive interviews, dialogues, sentence-completion data, and intense focus-group interactions, have revealed that for many female adolescents, suppression of voice becomes the only path through which they can preserve relationships. She and her colleagues have also identified a subgroup of "resisters," girls who attempt to reject the stereotype of the good woman and hold on to their voices. Her observations suggest, however, that for resisters, such a stance represents a double-edged sword. That is, although they continue to express their opinions forthrightly, they do so at the risk of being neglected or actively rejected by peers. Such resisters typically experience acute conflicts between their efforts to maintain their authenticity and the social repercussions of adopting such a stance.

Despite this intriguing analysis, Gilligan's efforts have not, to date, resulted in any systematic empirical demonstration of the prevalence of loss of voice among female adolescents (see Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Undoubtedly, there are female adolescents who fit these patterns; however, of critical interest is how extensive the patterns identified by Gilligan actually are. Moreover, in her most recent work, Gilligan has not addressed these issues in male adolescents. Rather, she and her colleagues have committed themselves to understanding girls' development, particularly the transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. In our own work, we felt it essential to address the question of whether the processes that characterize girls' development in our culture are relevant to the development of boys. We return to this issue in a subsequent section, presenting data revealing that individual differences in level of voice within each gender are very powerful, and that many of the processes that predict lack of voice in female adolescents operate similarly among male adolescents.

**LACK OF VOICE WITHIN THE SCHOOL SETTING**

The school setting appears to be a particularly interesting context within which to examine levels of adolescent voice among both boys and girls, given that it represents a microcosm of the larger society. Moreover, schools have come under increasing scrutiny and criticism for shortchanging girls in ways that may well undermine their desire or ability to voice their opinions. Recent claims of gender bias by Sadker and Sadker (1994) as well as a provocative report from Sadker and Sadker (1994) have interpreted the evidence as indicating that there are gender differences in both the quantity and quality of the attention that boys and girls receive. They have indicated that boys receive more positive attention as well as negative attention. With regard to positive attention, boys are reported to receive more praise and reinforcement for their efforts (see also the AAUW report, 1992; Baker, 1986; Brophy, 1981; Hansen et al., 1995), although others have not found that teachers provide more positive attention for boys (Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985). The classroom observations of these latter investigators revealed that boys are more likely to receive teacher communications concerning what are the proper procedures and behaviors, directives which are often negative. Brophy (1985) has concurred, reporting that boys are more likely to be the object of discipline and behavioral monitoring. Some investigators have reported that boys are also more likely to be called upon and listened to (see Meece, 1987; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Sadker and Sadker have also contended that boys receive more individualized attention, more encouragement to develop or embellish ideas expressed in class, and more constructive feedback if they are incorrect. Monaco and Gaier (1992) also have reported upon the marginalization of girls who cannot count on the same level of engagement with teachers as can boys. Others (Barbar & Cardinal, 1991; Brophy, 1985; Jones & Wheatley, 1990; Meece, 1987) have observed that such treatment is particularly likely in math and science classes, leading girls to question their ability at these subjects.

In contrast to boys, Sadker and Sadker (1994) have reported that girls receive more reinforcement for being compliant and quiet, and are given more reprimands for calling out the answer, both of which would be expected to stifle their expression of voice in the classroom. Contributing to these dynamics are observations that girls are recognized and reinforced for their physical appearance (hairstyles, clothing), and for the neatness of their written work, rather than for the ideas or opinions they may express. Moreover, girls presumably receive more comments denigrating their intellectual capacities, as well as more personal devaluation through sarcasm. Teachers' attributional feedback to girls is reported to emphasize effort for success, but lack of ability for failure, a pattern that should also serve to undermine girls' confidence and self-esteem. Although the Sadkers' work did not directly document how school practices impact such outcomes, the AAUW (1992) report suggests that the lowered self-esteem and confidence among girls that their own study revealed may be due to just such differential treatment, a cornerstone of their claim that schools are shortchanging girls. However, their
report also acknowledged that “there is no social science research to document cause and effect on this matter” (p. 67).

There are also other features of the curriculum and classroom that may be detrimental to girls. For example, boys’ interests are more frequently represented in the content of what is taught. Moreover, there are many more men represented as favorable role models in textbooks, for example, in subjects such as history, science, and literature (see AAUW report, 1992; Meece, 1987; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Scott & Schau, 1985; Tetreault, 1987). Such curriculum biases may well communicate to girls that the lives of women count for less than the accomplishments of men.

As many (see Delpit, 1993; Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994) have observed, the entire educational model appears to be based upon features more favorable to men stereotypes and socialization. For example, academic competition favors boys who have been socialized to value and display competitive behaviors (see Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985; Wilkinson, Lindow, & Chiang, 1995). The fact that the physical configuration of most classrooms still involves rows of desks facing the teacher fosters autonomy, independence, and individual effort in contrast to factors that have been found to be more conducive to learning for female students. Others (e.g., Lockheed, 1986) have suggested that large classroom groups are particularly likely to foster male students’ dominance. The newer “cooperative learning” models, which emphasize smaller classroom configurations in which students can make eye contact, exchange opinions comfortably, and work together toward an educational goal, have been found to produce more favorable outcomes for female students (see review by Kahl & Meece, 1994), although outcomes are partially determined by the specific gender composition of the group (see Webb & Palace, 1996; Wilkinson et al., 1995). Moreover, girls are more active and report more positive perceptions of their academic abilities in classrooms that provide them with individualized attention (see AAUW report, 1992; Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, in press; Hansen et al., 1995; McCaslin & Good, 1996; Meece, 1987; Pintrich & Blumenfeld, 1982).

These accounts suggest that at a more general level, it is the boys who are allowed to dominate the classroom. As such, the school setting clearly represents a microcosm of the larger society. As Miller (1986) cogently observed, cultural groups quickly sort themselves into “dominants” and “subordinates” in which the dominants have the power, and the subordinates are not only silenced but devalued. In patriarchal societies, men have typically become the dominants and women the subordinates. As Maher and Tetreault (1994) have pointed out, when you have cultures where one group (e.g., men) dominates over another group (e.g., women), the subordinates will become a “mute” culture within the more dominant culture. Such a mute culture will often be silent in very significant and profound ways.

With regard to the school setting, Maher and Tetreault have observed that the construction of voice is a function of position, in that students fashion themselves in terms of their relation to the dominant classroom culture. At puberty, they have noted, girls learn that becoming women includes subordination to men’s standards, which in turn requires that they stifle their level of voice. Delpit (1993) has concurred, observing that there are codes of power within the school setting, namely rules that specify how boys and girls should participate and play out their role. These rules dictate gender-appropriate linguistic and communicative strategies as well as forms of self-presentation, including whether and how one expresses oneself verbally. Boys typically dominate, they are louder, and as Orenstein (1994) has metaphorically observed, the squeaky wheel gets the grease; therefore, boys are afforded more recognition by teachers.

Given that the majority of teachers are women, how might female teachers function as role models for developing girls within such a classroom context? Shouldn’t teachers’ presence as verbalizing authorities offset the dominating tendencies of the boys by providing models that girls can emulate? Paradoxically not, according to those who have observed teacher–student patterns and gender dynamics within the classroom. As Meece (1987) has observed, teachers are often characterized as “hidden carriers” of society’s gender-role stereotyping, reinforcing traditional roles in the classroom (see also Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985). Delpit (1993) has further noted that authoritarian teaching styles rob students of the opportunity to express their own ideas, and may be particularly detrimental to girls for whom the classroom features described previously already conspire to stifle their voices.

Moreover, Maher and Tetreault (1994), as well as Gilligan (1993), have also observed that certain women teachers may embody the very attributes that define the good woman stereotype. Some women teachers, they have argued, attempt to be the perfect role models for girls, which in part involves teaching them the structure and traditions of the worlds they are entering. Such teachers, according to Gilligan, instruct girls about the necessity of renouncing the self and, in the name of being good women, take themselves out of genuine relationships with their female students. Fine’s (1991) observations have supported these claims, in that she finds that many girls learn to shut down what teachers consider to be “dangerous conversation,” namely, girls learn to mute their own voices. The more assertive girls who fail to conform are often those most likely to drop out of school. On the basis of her own focus-group interactions with teachers, Gilligan (personal communication, November 24, 1996) has further observed that many actively struggle with these issues. On the one hand, many teachers would like to encourage girls’ voices, for example, when they thoughtfully disagree with a particular school policy that they, themselves, have also questioned. However, such teachers are conflicted if they have
not voiced their own dissatisfaction, fearing reprisals from those in positions of authority within the school system.

Although this analysis would appear to represent a devastating critique of how teachers are negatively impacting the voice of girls within the classroom, there are several caveats to be underscored. Many of the claims in the educational literature appear in books (e.g., Sadker & Sadker, 1994), where compelling empirical research findings and documentation are not provided. Whereas the Sadkers have cited some studies conducted by other researchers, most of the conclusions have been based on more informal interviews, observations, and anecdotal reports which, although compelling, need to be more systematically demonstrated. (The numerical data that they reported from their own investigations have not, to date, appeared in peer-reviewed research journals.) Other studies, published in research journals, do provide some documentation. However, as the carefully conducted classroom observational studies of Eccles and Blumenfeld (1985) have revealed, differences in the educational experiences of male and female students are surprisingly small. Based on his own research in the classroom, Brophy (1985) came to a similar conclusion, observing that teachers react more to students’ behavior rather than to their gender.

Moreover, lacking in this literature is evidence on how proposed classroom interactions between teachers and students actually impact the outcomes of interest. That is, there are no findings directly linking potential practices to consequences such as lack of confidence, voice, or low self-esteem in students. The emphasis has primarily been on how teachers’ treatment of male students (as a group) may differ from female students (as a group) without thoughtful attention to individual differences within each gender. That is, particular female and male adolescents may be treated differentially by teachers, in part because of characteristics that individual students bring to the classroom (see Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985). For example, teachers respond more negatively to those boys whose classroom behavior is disruptive (Brophy, 1985). Thus, we need to guard against generalizations about how the genders are differentially treated in the classroom. Furthermore, as Eccles and Blumenfeld (1985) cogently observed, there may be arenas in which teachers treat boys and girls quite similarly, however, such common treatment of the genders may affect boys and girls differently. For example, teachers may encourage classroom competition in both genders, however, the effects will be less favorable for many girls.

In addition, we need to attend to student interactions themselves, examining how the genders treat each other. To what extent might voice be undermined if it is not supported by one’s classmates? For example, will girls’ voices be undermined to the extent that they do not receive support from male classmates? Finally, in the educational literature, the primary focus has been on causal factors that involve teaching practices in the classroom. There is too little emphasis on the fact that children and adolescents bring very powerful socialization histories from outside the classroom to their own school experience (see also Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985). Thus, it behooves us to examine these factors as well, because they undoubtedly color, and interact with, the dynamics within the school context.

WHAT CHILDREN BRING TO THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

Considerable literature (see reviews by Basow, 1992; Beal, 1994; Eisenberg, Martin, & Fabes, 1996; Huston, 1983; Ruble, 1988) has revealed that parents continue to have differential expectations for girls and boys, and that children are highly motivated to observe and master the gender stereotypes that their society identifies as appropriate for women and men (Bem, 1985). These stereotypes specify that girls should be polite, obedient, compliant, nonassertive, quiet, empathic and understanding toward others, nurturant, and physically attractive. Boys, conversely, are expected and encouraged to be independent or autonomous, intellectually curious, achievement-oriented, adventurous (including taking risks), assertive, competitive, aggressive, and logical or rational in their approach to solving problems. The very term opposite sex codifies these differing societal expectations. Given the societal expectations for girls, elements of the good woman stereotype may already be in place before they enter school. Moreover, to the extent that their own mother embodies this stereotype, there will be further forces encouraging girls to emulate such a role model. Girls also have far fewer societal role models in the form of strong women whose voices are expressed and appreciated, in contrast to boys for whom the number of role models is legion.

Given the expectation that women should be compliant and quiet if not invisible in certain contexts, many girls may be less likely to receive direct support or validation from parents for the expression of their opinions. On the contrary, they may be rewarded for being good listeners, deferring to the dominants who are entitled to their say (see also Meece, 1987). Alternatively, boys are more likely to receive parental encouragement and support for expressing their viewpoints, because it should foster expectations that they should be assertive, forceful, independent, and competitive.

Early differential expectations for the genders also dictate different toy and activity preferences as well as different play and interactive styles which, in turn, result in rampant gender segregation beginning in the preschool years (see Carter, 1987; Hayden-Thompson, Rubin, & Hymel, 1986; Leaper, 1994; Maccoby, 1990, 1994) and persisting into middle childhood and adolescence (see Lockheed, 1985; Meece, 1987). Gender segregation may be reinforced by teachers because gender often becomes the basis for organizing students, for example, in lining up, working on special projects, and so
forth, although it is often irrelevant to the activity (Meece, 1987).

It is interesting to note that the findings have revealed powerful motives for girls to avoid interactions with boys in that boys either ignore girls or are not responsive to girls’ feedback or bids for interaction, a pattern that begins in preschool (Maccoby, 1990, 1994) and continues into elementary school years and beyond (Lockheed, 1985; Webb & Kenderski, 1985; Wilkinson et al., 1985). These findings also revealed that if boys do attend to girls’ behavior, it is often in the form of taunting or teasing. Moreover, many girls experience sexual harassment at the hands of boys, which is often viewed by school officials as harmless instances of “boys will be boys” (see AAUW report, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Strauss, 1988). Thus, girls’ voices are typically ignored or devalued by boys from a very early age. As a result, when girls enter into the classroom to receive formal academic training, many may bring with them a history that already dictates girls’ subordination by boys.

The very interactive styles that each gender develops in their segregated play groups should also favor the subsequent display of more confidence by male students in the classroom. As Lever’s (1976) observations initially revealed, boys are much more likely to engage in competitive group games with complex rules that force them to learn how to articulate principles and adjudicate conflicts. Girls, on the other hand, engage in more dyadic interactions that foster cooperation, listening, turn-taking, and sensitivity to the other’s thoughts and feelings. Although the skills that girls acquire may be critical in the development of friendships and close relationships, they are less adaptive in a classroom setting that rewards assertiveness and competition. Here, boys may have an edge, bringing a socialization history that has already fostered and rewarded their expression of voice in a group context.

Given the greater emphasis for women on establishing and preserving close relationships (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Chodorow, 1989; Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 1991; Miller, 1986; Rubin, 1985; Simmons & Blyth, 1987), the expression of their opinions may also be stifled to the extent that it could threaten the relationship. As Gilligan et al. (1989) have argued, fears that expressing one’s viewpoint may anger the other, create conflict, or risk the other’s rejection, represent powerful motives for suppressing one’s voice. The importance of the social matrix is also underscored by Orenstein (1994), who has observed that women are more sensitive to what others think than are men, leading them to more carefully monitor what they say. Orenstein also noted that girls tend to be more fearful of being embarrassed, which extends to anxiety about giving the wrong answer in class, lest they experience exposure in the form of negative feedback from teachers as well as rebuke from male students. Each of these factors would contribute to lack of voice for those girls who display these characteristics.

Orenstein has also reported that girls are less willing to take risks, in general, an observation documented by the work of Block (see Block, 1983), whose findings revealed that outside the classroom, girls are given fewer opportunities for exploration, risk taking, and active problem solving, particularly in challenging situations. Findings reviewed in Eccles et al. (in press) have revealed that girls are more likely to avoid challenge as well as competitive situations. Within the classroom, such a history could well prevent them from offering an answer or a viewpoint about which they may not feel confident. Orenstein has noted that students who talk in class have more opportunity to enhance their self-esteem through exposure to praise for correct answers. In addition, they have the luxury of learning from their mistakes, if they develop the perspective that failure can represent a positive educational tool.

Eccles et al. (in press) have also reviewed findings indicating that gender differences are more likely to be observed in domains where there are stereotypes about each gender that are endorsed by girls and boys. Thus, those girls who believe the stereotype that boys are more competent at particular school subjects such as math will be more likely to lack confidence and to avoid challenge in that domain. Spencer and Steele (1995) recently documented such vulnerability to stereotypes in their demonstration that college women who were told that men do better on a challenging math test did worse than those who were told that men and women perform comparably. Eccles et al. (in press) has provided additional evidence that social scripts regarding what is proper behavior for each gender in particular situations, combined with ideal images about what one should be like, represent powerful influences governing the behavior of both genders (see also Archer, 1989).

For girls, certain stereotypes create conflict between the scripts defining gender roles and incompatible achievement goals. For example, Orenstein (1994) has observed that girls may fear looking too intelligent, because smart girls are often stigmatized. Many fear that to display their intelligence will lead to their social rejection by boys, who either do not value intellectual ability as a feminine attribute, or may feel threatened lest they feel less competent, by comparison. Smart girls may fear alienation from their girlfriends, as well, who may view them as show-offs or too academically competitive. Rather than risk social censure, such girls choose not to express their knowledge or opinions, particularly within the public classroom domain. Bell (1989) has documented these conflicts among gifted elementary school girls. Female students in the study expressed concern over appearing to be a braggart if they expressed pride in their accomplishments. Even more specific to the issue of voice were these girls’ concerns over seeming too aggressive if they attempted to attract the teacher’s attention. Moreover, they worried about hurting others’ feelings if they were too competitive in achievement situations.

If expressing one’s opinions is likely to incur the social rejection of boys, might girls’ focus on their physical appearance to garner the attention of male students? Not only are
boys attuned to girls' looks, but, according to the Sadkers' report (Sadker & Sadker, 1994), teachers are more likely to give feedback to girls about their appearance than about their academic competence or their opinions. This orientation mirrors the message of the larger culture that women's voices are not valued and their opinions are not taken seriously; rather, a woman's looks are potentially her greatest commodity. Thus, popular culture and the media perpetuate the stereotype of the desirable woman who should be seen and not heard. Movies, television, magazines, rock videos, and advertising all tout the importance of physical attractiveness, glamorizing the popular role models to be emulated. The media messages assault female adolescents and adults with exhortations that they become thinner and more attractive; in such advertising, there is the implicit assumption that looks are more critical than intelligence and the expression of one's opinion. For example, observe in ads for clothing, perfume, and other women's products the number of headless women. If women are depicted with heads, they are often deprived of a cortex. Images of these headless and decorticate women unconsciously communicate the message that women are mindless, brainless, and therefore perhaps should be voiceless. A recent ad depicting a woman applying perfume put it quite explicitly. The caption read: "Make a statement without saying a word." To the extent that women buy into these images, and fashion their behaviors accordingly, their voices will necessarily go underground.

In this section we reviewed a number of characteristics, attitudes, and attributional patterns that boys and girls may bring to the classroom as a result of societal expectations and their own socialization histories, focusing on gender differences in the literature that are most likely to differentially impact level of voice. Our goal has been to suggest that both boys and girls already come to the classroom with histories and experiences that could lead to a pattern in which girls' are more reluctant, and boys more likely, to express their voice, particularly if they have been socialized to accept and adopt the societal stereotypes for their gender (Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985; Huston, 1983).

These arguments hinge, however, on just these assumptions, namely that the vast majority of girls and boys have been differentially treated by socializing agents, generalizations that may not be warranted. For example, Brophy (1985) reviewed literature demonstrating that individuals of both genders vary considerably in their adoption of the attitudes and behaviors associated with societal gender stereotypes. Moreover, it is often assumed or inferred that the effects of differential treatment, the potential differences between the genders, are not only significant but large. However, as scholars have noted (see Crawford, 1989; Eagly, 1995; Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985; Eisenberg et al., 1996; Ruble, 1988), most gender differences documented in the literature are not large, and for those that may be statistically significant, effect sizes may be relatively small, given the tremendous overlap in the distributions for men and women. Furthermore, as Eagly (1995) has pointed out, even when effect sizes are relatively large, the overlap is still considerable, suggesting that the majority of men and women are more similar than different. Thus, what is most striking about a careful analysis of such distributions is the tremendous range of scores within each gender, namely, the individual differences among both men and women that should command our attention. In the next session, we review findings from our own laboratory where we have adopted just such an individual difference perspective with regard to level of voice both inside and outside of the classroom.

OUR STUDIES OF LACK OF VOICE: PREDICTORS OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN EACH GENDER

Although Gilligan and others have claimed that many adolescent girls lose their voices, there has been little systematic empirical evidence on whether voice declines developmentally for female adolescents or on whether there are gender differences in level of voice. Thus, we embarked upon a program of research to examine predictors and correlates of level of voice among male and female adolescents. Between the ages of 12 and 18, what is the developmental trajectory of voice for girls as well as boys? Although the focus of this article is on voice within the school setting, we were interested in whether voice differed as a function of relational context. Three contexts were school related, namely, voice with male classmates, female classmates, and teachers. Two contexts outside of school were included for purposes of comparison, in which we examined level of voice with parents and with close friends. We were also interested in certain variables that might predict individual differences in voice. In addition, we addressed the issue of whether lack of voice was considered by teenagers to reflect false self-behavior. Finally, we were interested in whether there were liabilities associated with lack of voice. To date, we collected data in both a coeducational middle school (Grades 6 through 8, approximately 130 students per grade) and high school (Grades 9 through 11, approximately 100 students per grade) and in an all-girls high school (Grades 9 through 12, approximately 50 girls per grade). Students were primarily White (between 85 to 89 percent within each setting) from lower-middle-class to upper-middle-class backgrounds.

Measurement Issues

As an initial strategy, we were interested in assessing level of voice through self-report procedures. In previous work (Harter, Marold, et al., 1996) we determined that questionnaire methods were quite effective in documenting individual differences in perceived level of true versus false self-behavior among adolescents. Thus, we built upon this methodology.
We first developed questionnaire items that tapped adolescents' ability to share what they are thinking, say what's on their minds, and express their opinions in different relationships. A sample item is: "Some teenagers usually don't say what's on their mind to (particular persons) BUT Other teenagers do say what's on their mind to (particular persons)." Participants first selected the kind of teenagers they are most like and then indicated whether that choice is "Really true for me" or "Sort of true for me." Items were scored on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (lowest level of voice) to 4 (highest level of voice). The particular persons have varied across studies, and have included parents, teachers, classmates (male and female classmates separately in one study), close friends, and boys in social situations. Subscales, defined by relationship, included either four or five items.

Internal consistency reliabilities were consistently high, ranging from .82 to .91 across subscales in three studies (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, & Kastelic, in press; Johnson, 1995; Waters & Gonzales, 1995). Convergent validity was established in one study (Johnson, 1995), tapping voice in five different relationship contexts: with parents, male friends, female friends, classmates, and teachers. On a separate task designed to tap multiple selves, a task administered on a different day, participants were asked to generate six attributes for each of the five roles. Attributes could reflect any characteristics the adolescent felt were displayed in each context. A subset of attributes could be scored as high voice (e.g., talkative, open, argumentative, assertive, speak my opinion, truthful, say how I feel, being myself) and as low voice (e.g., quiet, keep thoughts to myself, closed off, withdrawn, not completely honest, not truthful, not being me). For purposes of validity, a content analysis was performed on these attributes. Participants were selected as either high voice or low voice if at least two of the six attributes per role fell into one of these categories (and none fell into the other category). We then compared the voice scores from our questionnaire for these high- and low-voice groups. Across the five roles, means for low-voice participants' questionnaire scores ranged from 1.83 to 2.56, whereas means for high-voice participants' scores ranged from 3.27 to 3.50. For every role, t tests revealed that the differences were highly significant (ps of .0001 for all but one role, which was significant at .01).

We have addressed the issue of construct validity by asking whether lack of voice is actually perceived by adolescents to be false self-behavior (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, et al., in press). In our initial studies of voice, we simply assumed that lack of voice represents false self-behavior, in large part because adolescents cite the inability to express their opinions as one manifestation of the false self. However, one can imagine other motives for lack of voice that do not imply lack of authenticity. For example, (a) one may be shy, temperamentally; (b) one may feel that it is not socially appropriate to express one's opinions in certain contexts; or (c) one may choose not to share certain opinions that are considered private. In our coed sample, therefore, we created items to determine whether adolescents perceive lack of voice as false or true self-behavior. For example: "When I don't say what I am thinking around (particular persons) I feel like I am not being the real me" versus "When I don't say what I am thinking around (particular persons), it feels like I am being the real me." A second set of items addressed the extent to which adolescents were bothered or upset by not expressing their opinions in each relationship. Approximately 75% of adolescents of both genders indicated that failure to express their opinions did constitute false self-behavior. By way of converging evidence, 75% also reported that they were bothered by not saying what they really think. The percentages were quite similar across the different relational contexts, bolstering our assumption that, for the large majority of adolescents, lack of voice is perceived as suppression of the true self.

Relational Context

Initially, we were interested in whether there were meaningful differences across relational contexts. Gilligan (1993), for example, has observed that one arena in which adolescent girls are able to maintain their voice is with close friends. Our findings (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, in press; Johnson, 1995) have revealed that for both genders, voice is highest with close friends, followed by classmates of the same gender. However, voice is consistently lower with classmates of the opposite gender, as well as with parents and teachers. For those in the all-girls high school, voice is lowest with boys in social situations (Johnson, 1995). Further evidence (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, et al., in press) comes from our factor analysis of voice scores across relationships where we obtain a clear five-factor solution (voice with close friends, female classmates, male classmates, parents, and teachers) with extremely high loadings (range = .62 to .90, average = .80) and negligible cross loadings (all 0 to .20). Thus, clearly the nature of the relationship is important in that adolescents are more comfortable expressing their opinions in some relational contexts than in others. Of particular relevance to the school context is the finding that voice is lower with classmates of the opposite gender, as well as with teachers, compared to classmates of the same gender and close friends (who are also predominantly of the same gender).

Thus, the overall pattern revealed that voice is considerably higher among peers of the same gender than among adults (teachers and parents) as well as peers of the opposite gender. These findings are consistent with the peer literature (see reviews by Brown, 1990; Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990) which revealed that same-gender peers serve critical functions, allowing adolescents to express as well as clarify their thoughts and feelings within an atmosphere of support and trust. This pattern also cautions against making generalizations about level of voice, given that the degree to which
one expresses what one thinks is highly dependent upon the relational context.

Does Voice Differ by Grade Level or Gender?

Of particular relevance to Gilligan’s thesis is whether voice declines for girls across 6th through 12th grades. Gilligan’s argument is that girls in our society are particularly vulnerable to loss of voice for the reasons discussed earlier. Our cross-sectional data have revealed no significant mean differences associated with grade level for either gender, nor are there even any trends, in either the coeducational or all-girls schools (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, et al., in press; Johnson, 1995; Waters & Gonzales, 1995). Voice does not decline within the school contexts (with classmates and teachers) nor does it decline in those relationships outside the school setting (with parents or close friends). Thus, there is no evidence in our data for loss of voice among female adolescents as a group, given how we have assessed it. One possibility is that by 6th grade (ages 12–13) the processes cited by Gilligan may have already taken place. However, the mean levels we obtained (average scores of around 3 on a 4-point scale) have revealed that levels of voice are relatively high among young female adolescents (Waters & Gonzales, 1995), arguing against such an interpretation.

We have also found no evidence for gender differences favoring boys. In the middle school, scores were quite comparable for boys and girls (Waters & Gonzales, 1995). In a second study at the middle school level (sixth, seventh, and eighth grades), the findings also revealed no gender differences (Harter & Talmi, 1997). At the high school level, girls actually reported somewhat higher levels of voice with close friends than did boys, females classmates, parents, and teachers (and comparable scores in the context of male classmates). Thus, the age and gender findings caution against making generalizations about the developmental trajectory of voice for most or all female adolescents, particularly where comparisons with boys are implicit. Rather, the most impressive discoveries in our data have been the marked individual differences in level of voice among both male and female adolescents, differences that became the focus of our inquiry as we sought to examine what factors might be responsible. Two such factors seemed to be plausible starting points, namely, gender orientation and the level of support for voice.

Gender Orientation

One of Gilligan’s (see Brown & Gilligan, 1992) arguments is that adolescent girls observe and then attempt to adopt the good woman stereotype in the culture, part of which encourages an ethic of caring in which women are encouraged to be more sensitive to others’ needs and desires than to their own. Moreover, the good woman listens empathically to others, often at the expense of speaking her own mind. Yet, what percentage of adolescent girls in the 1990s are buying into that stereotype, accepting it as their ideal? To address this issue, we included a measure of gender orientation in which many of the feminine items reflected features of the good woman stereotype. We drew items from several instruments in the literature including the Personality Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975), the Sex Role Inventory, developed by Bem (1985), and Boldizar’s (1991) adaptation for children and adolescents. Feminine items tap themes that include sensitivity, warmth, empathy, expressions of affection, enjoyment of babies and children, gentleness, and concern for others who are in distress. Masculine items tap dimensions such as competitiveness, ability to make decisions, independence, risk taking, confidence, athleticism, mechanical aptitude, individualism, leadership, and enjoyment of math and science. (Across these instruments there are a few items that tap voice-like constructs, for example, assertive vs. shy. However, we did not include these items in our analyses because they represent potential confounds between the independent variable—gender orientation, and the dependent variable—level of voice.)

We were particularly interested in the hypothesis that among adolescent girls, those displaying a predominantly feminine orientation—endorsing feminine but not masculine items—would report lower levels of voice compared to those displaying an androgynous orientation—endorsing both feminine and masculine items (Waters & Gonzales, 1995). Within our samples, there was clearly a subsample of female adolescents who appeared to identify with the good woman stereotype, endorsing only the feminine items, eschewing masculine characteristics (approximately 25% to 35% of our samples of female adolescents). Androgynous girls typically represented approximately 60% to 70% of these samples. (There was an insufficient number of masculine girls, approximately 5%, to make meaningful, statistical comparisons.) Hill and Lynch (1986) have argued that at adolescence there is increased pressure to conform to the prevailing societal gender stereotypes, what they refer to as “gender intensification.” Although we do not know at what point in development our participants may have adopted their particular gender orientation, our data suggest that those who endorse feminine but not masculine attributes represent only a subgroup of female adolescents; this pattern does not characterize the gender orientations of adolescent girls, as a group. As others have also observed (e.g., Brophy, 1985), individuals differ considerably in their adoption of societal gender stereotypes.

With regard to level of voice, the findings (see Figure 1) revealed that femininity does represent a liability for girls in certain, but not all, relational contexts (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, et al., in press). It is interesting to note that feminine girls reported significantly lower levels of voice than did androgynous girls in the more public context of school, namely with
teachers and classmates. Further examination of the data revealed that feminine girls reported particularly low levels of voice with male classmates compared to female classmates. Among girls in the all-girls school, the voice of the feminine girls was lowest with boys in social situations (Johnson, 1995). However, in more private interpersonal relationships, namely with close friends and parents, these differences were not obtained, suggesting that femininity is not a liability in these contexts. Dimensions of femininity such as empathy and concern for others may well facilitate expression of voice in such close relationships. In Figure 2, prototypical scores of two individual girls, one feminine and one androgynous, provide examples of how level of voice may vary across each of the five relational contexts. Scores were the same for level of voice with parents and close friends. However, among those in the more public domain of school, namely with teachers, male classmates, and female classmates, voice levels were considerably lower for the feminine, compared to the androgynous, participant, although the relative pattern was similar.

Our findings suggest a refinement of Gilligan’s position. First, they caution against making generalizations based on gender alone because our evidence revealed that it is not gender, per se, but gender orientation that best predicts level of voice among girls. Second, our evidence suggests that a feminine orientation primarily represents a liability for the expression of voice in public contexts, namely in the school setting with teachers and classmates, as well as in social situations with boys. As Meece (1987) has observed, public situations in which others can observe and evaluate one’s attributes provoke concerns about self-presentation and the appropriateness of one’s behaviors and attributes. It is in these more public social contexts that one might expect those highly feminine female adolescents to display behaviors consistent with the good woman societal stereotype (Gilligan et al., 1989), leading to their suppression of voice. Thus, the arguments put forth by Gilligan and colleagues, as well as by Pipher (1994) and Orenstein (1994), would appear to be restricted to a particular subset of girls, those endorsing a feminine gender orientation, who primarily suppress their voices in those more public arenas where they feel that certain stereotypic feminine behaviors (e.g., being nice and unassertive) are appropriate or demanded.

Pipher has observed that “Most girls choose to be socially accepted and split into two selves, one that is authentic and one that is culturally scripted. In public they become who they are supposed to be” (p. 38). However, our own findings have revealed that such statements need to be qualified, because they do not necessarily represent the reality of most girls. Rather, they apply to a subsample of girls who have publicly embraced the good woman stereotype. Whether these girls experience the conflict that Gilligan and others have described is an interesting question for further study, as is the related issue of whether this group considers their feminine attitudes to be true or false self-characteristics. On balance, although the school setting may represent a microcosm of the larger society, girls bring different socialization histories to this context, including individual differences in gender orientation which, in turn, impact their level of voice.

As Eccles et al. (in press) have observed in their review of achievement motivation in children, it is those girls who buy into gender stereotypes about what is desirable behavior for women—for example, the script that girls are less academically competent—who are likely to suffer. Girls who have less stereotypical role models in their own mothers will be more likely to resist these scripts and to demonstrate more confidence in achievement situations. Moreover, they have reported other studies revealing that parents who endorse such gender-role stereotypes distort their evaluations of their children’s abilities in the gender-stereotypic direction (see also Jacobs, 1992; Jacobs & Eccles, 1992).

In our own data, gender orientation functioned somewhat differently for boys, among whom we were able to
identify both masculine (50%) and androgynous (49%) subgroups. No differences in level of voice were observed with teachers, parents, and female classmates. However, masculine boys reported higher levels of voice with male classmates than did their androgynous counterparts, suggesting that androgyny is a liability for boys in this context. However, with close friends, androgynous boys reported higher levels of voice than did masculine boys, suggesting that the possession of certain characteristics identified as "feminine" allows one to more comfortably express oneself within a more intimate relationship.

Support for Voice

The literature, including our own work, has revealed that lack of support, initially from parents, serves as a major factor leading children of both genders to suppress their true thoughts and feelings. Clinicians within the psychodynamic tradition, for example, Bleiberg (1984) and Winnicott (1965), have focused on the developmental precursors of false self-behavior within the family. For Bleiberg, false self-behavior resulted from the actions of caregivers who did not validate the child's true self, namely the expression of their thoughts, feelings, and needs. Winnicott amplified upon this analysis, observing that intrusive or over-involved parents cause the young child to develop a false self based upon compliance. Such a child becomes prematurely attuned to the demands of the parent and, as a result, loses touch with his or her own needs. Because there is little acceptance for the child's authentic experiences and attributes, the true self goes into hiding, as the child increasingly feels compelled to suppress its expression (see also Horney, 1945; Sullivan, 1953).

These themes are echoed in more contemporary treatments. For example, Deci and Ryan (1995) have contended that a child's true self is fostered by caregivers who love the child for whom he or she is, rather than for matching a socially imposed, external standard. In contrast, false self-behavior will emerge to the extent that caregivers make the child's living up to their particular standards, because the child must adopt a socially implanted self. In our own work, we have documented similar effects, empirically (Harter, Marold, et al., 1996). Initially, we demonstrated that adolescents' reports reveal considerable variability in the extent to which they are being their true selves versus being false or phony, namely putting on an act or saying things you think the other person wants to hear. We predicted that adolescents reporting relatively low levels of approval from parents, as well as peers, would be motivated to suppress their thoughts, opinions, and feelings and engage in false self-behavior in hopes of garnering support.

In addition, we hypothesized that the conditionality of support (similar to Deci & Ryan's concept of contingent approval) would affect false self-behavior. Conditional support was defined as the perception that approval will only be forthcoming if one meets very high and seemingly unrealistic expectations of significant others. It represents the antithesis of what Rogers (1951) termed "unconditional positive regard" for who one is as a person. Our findings revealed that conditional "support" is not perceived as supportive because it does not validate one's sense of who one is as a person. Rather, it specifies the psychological hoops through which one must jump to try to please others by meeting their standards (Harter, Marold, & Whitesell, 1991). Our research has revealed that the combination of relatively low levels of support, coupled with conditionality, are highly predictive of false self-behavior (Harter, Marold, et al., 1996).

Building upon that work, we reasoned that level of support for voice, specifically, should be associated with the level of voice expressed. We created support for voice items that tapped the adolescent's perceptions of others' interest in what one had to say, respect for one's ideas even if there is disagreement, ability to listen to one's opinions and take them seriously, and attempts to understand one's point of view.

We have obtained marked effects that are highly comparable for both genders and can be demonstrated across all relationships. Figure 3 presents these effects for our coeducational high school sample, in which the scores of girls and boys were combined (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, et al., in press). As this figure clearly reveals, within every relationship, adolescents who reported low support also reported the lowest levels of voice, those who reported high support reported high levels of voice, and those who indicated moderate support fell in between. As Figure 3 reveals, the individual differences in level of voice that were directly related to the amount of support one received for voice were quite dramatic. Those who reported that others do not encourage or listen to their views had scores around the midpoint of the scale, whereas those who reported high levels of support for verbalizing their opinions had scores near the top of the 4-point scale. Thus, both adolescent males and females who receive

![FIGURE 3 Mean levels of voice within each context for those reporting high, moderate, and low support for voice.](image-url)
encouragement and support for expressing their views acknowledged the highest levels of voice (see also Monaco & Gaier, 1992, who emphasized the importance of supportive teachers who encourage girls to experiment with new roles and aspirations in the school setting).

There are two possible interpretations of these findings relating support for voice to self-reported level of voice, conclusions that are not mutually exclusive. Support, in the form of encouragement and validation, may promote high levels of voice in adolescents. It is also plausible that those adolescents who have relatively high levels of voice are more likely to be heard and supported. Those remaining more muted create far fewer opportunities to garner support. It is likely to be heard and supported. Those remaining more likely that both of these processes are operative.

The pattern of findings also reveals the additive effects of support and gender orientation, particularly in more public relational contexts. In the all-girls high school we had enough participants to cross support with gender orientation (Johnson, 1995). Figure 4 presents the findings for one such context, namely voice with teachers. The same pattern was observed for voice with parents, with female classmates, and with boys in social situations. The differences associated with the combination of support for voice and gender orientation were dramatic. Feminine girls who also reported low levels of support are most at risk for lack of voice. The androgynous girls who also reported high levels of support are most able to express their voices.

Although we have crossed gender orientation with support for the purposes of these analyses, forcing them to be orthogonal, one can ask whether certain gender orientations among both girls and boys are more likely to be supported by teachers and classmates within the school context. Wigfield, Eccles, and Pintrich (1996) have made the general observation that teachers respond differentially to students in the same classroom, based upon characteristics that they bring to the educational setting. This issue is particularly germane given claims in the AAUW (1992) report and by Sadker and Sadker (1994) that girls are being shortchanged in our school system. With our own data, we sought to examine teacher and classmate support for voice as a function of the gender orientation of the students.

Our findings (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, et al., in press) have revealed that in both coeducational and all-girls high school settings, the androgynous girls perceived greater teacher support ($M = 3.2$) than did the feminine girls ($M = 2.9$). Thus, it is the subset of those endorsing the feminine stereotypes who may be shortchanged with regard to support for voice. In the coeducational setting, androgynous boys reported more teacher support ($M = 3.1$) than did the masculine boys ($M = 2.6$). Among the latter group may be those boys who are more likely to be disruptive. Thus, from the perspective of adolescents, teachers provide more approval for androgynous students of both genders, relative to those displaying the feminine and masculine stereotypes. However, as Wigfield et al. (1996) have urged, we need more detailed classroom observational evidence to determine the precise nature of the link between teachers' behaviors and students' perceptions.

Although teachers have borne the brunt of criticism with regard to differential treatment of the genders, it is also instructive to examine the support provided by classmates within the school setting. In the coed setting, feminine girls not only reported less support for voice from teachers, but from both male ($M = 2.5$) and female ($M = 2.9$) classmates, compared to androgynous girls who reported more support from both boys ($M = 3.2$) and girls ($M = 3.3$). Among the boys, masculine and androgynous subgroups reported equal levels of support from both male and female classmates. Thus, for female students, it would appear that it is primarily the feminine girls who may be getting shortchanged and who are more likely to be populating the "silent ghetto" in the classroom. However, lower levels of support for voice come not only from teachers but from classmates as well, particularly male classmates. Although feminine girls may receive support for other attributes, for example, their physical appearance, it is noteworthy that they are receiving less support from boys than do androgynous girls for the expression of their opinions, in particular. Findings reviewed in an earlier section revealed that boys typically ignore the comments of female students. Our results suggest that the feminine girls are the particular targets of such treatment. From the standpoint of improving the classroom environment for such girls, it would be important to consider teacher interventions or educational practices that allow voiceless female students to express their opinions and that encourage male students to develop a greater appreciation for what female students have to contribute.

**FIGURE 4 Mean levels of voice with teachers for feminine and androgynous female adolescents at three levels of support for voice (from Johnson, 1995).**

**OTHER FACTORS THAT MAY LEAD TO INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN VOICE AMONG BOTH GENDERS**

Our central thesis is that although previous analyses have argued that girls, in particular, are more vulnerable to lack of
voice, we have found no evidence for overall gender differences. Rather, individual differences in level of voice within both genders are marked, and need to be accounted for in theory and research. In our own work, we initially focused the most systematic attention on two factors, gender orientation (particularly for adolescent girls) and level of support for voice, which are highly correlated with the level of voice that is reported. However, there are other potential predictors of such individual differences within each gender that we have begun to examine at the high school level.

Parents as Role Models for Voice

The findings discussed previously clearly reveal the dramatic links between support for voice and adolescents' expression of their opinions. However, in addition to providing encouragement and support for voice, significant others can also serve as models of voice or its absence. Thus, individual differences in the modeling behavior displayed by significant others may also contribute to individual differences in the level of voice that adolescents express. Although Gilligan et al. (1989) have argued that for many girls their own mother serves as a model of voice or its absence, they suggested that some mothers represent strong role models and therefore can have a positive influence on the voice of their daughters.

In a recent dissertation (Buddin, 1996) on the impact of parent variables on voice, we examined the effects of parental support for voice as well as role modeling of voice by parents. In this study, we built upon the work of Grotevant and Cooper (1983, 1986), who have presented a model in which parental displays of individuation (expressing one's opinions clearly) and connectedness (being open to, and respectful of, adolescents' opinions) are both critical to adolescents' adaptive functioning. We examined this model empirically, as it related to level of voice, and obtained evidence for an additive model in which both factors contributed. Those adolescents, boys and girls, with parents who both modeled the clear expression of their own opinions and provided support for the expression of their adolescent's opinion, reported the highest level of voice ($M = 3.52$ on a 4-point scale). In contrast, those adolescents at the other extreme, with parents who neither modeled the expression of their own opinions nor reinforced their adolescents' opinions, reported the lowest levels of voice ($M = 2.23$). The other two combinations, parental modeling without support ($M = 2.63$) and parent support without modeling ($M = 3.29$) fell in between. We found no evidence of significant gender differences. Rather, as in our earlier studies, individual differences in parenting styles contributed to individual differences in adolescent voice for both genders.

Threats to the Relationship

Gilligan (1993) has argued that a primary motive for girls' suppression of voice is the fear that to express one's opinion might threaten the relationship, namely, lead to conflict, tension, or rejection by the other. Such a motive should be particularly critical for adolescent girls and women, given the assumption that relationships are more critical to women. In our study with high school students in the coeducational setting, we presented those students low in voice with a list of potential motives for not expressing their opinions in each relational context (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, et al., in press). One of our subscales tapped threats to the relationship; for example, the other person would get mad if they didn't like what one said, it might cause conflict between us, the other person might break things off, it might cause tension, and so forth. Threats to the relationship was a common reason endorsed for not expressing one's opinion. There were no gender differences in the endorsement of this motive for relationships with parents or teachers; within the parental relationship, both boys and girls with low voice cited this motive at the same level. However, for relationships with classmates, girls were more concerned about threatening the relationship with male classmates, whereas boys were more concerned about threatening the relationship with female classmates. Threats to the relationship were less of an issue with same-gender classmates for boys and girls. Thus, it would appear that adolescent boys who lack voice are also concerned about how saying the wrong thing might jeopardize their relationships, particularly with female adolescents. These reactions, among both genders, may be heightened during the period of adolescence. That is, self-consciousness, concerns that one is the object of others' scrutiny, and developing romantic interests, may make female as well as male adolescents particularly sensitive to actions that may threaten relationships with the opposite gender. Thus, it would be interesting to study these processes at earlier and later periods of development.

Self-Consciousness and Embarrassment

Another factor, assumed by some to be more of a motive for girls than boys for not offering one's opinion is that such expression would lead to embarrassment. For example, Orenstein (1994) has contended that girls tend to be more fearful of being embarrassed in the classroom, and are more sensitive to what others think, leading to greater self-consciousness. In our coeducational high school study, we also included items to tap this motive for suppressing one's views. Items included the fact that one would be embarrassed, one might look stupid, others would laugh at you, and so forth. Here, we found the same pattern that we obtained for threats to the relationships. Girls low in voice were more concerned about these social repercussions in the context of male classmates, whereas boys low in voice were more concerned around female classmates, but the levels endorsed with their opposite-gender classmates was virtually identical. (Both genders were less concerned about being embarrassed or looking stupid with same-gender classmates, at comparable levels.) However, there were no
Thus, low-voice boys in our sample were just as likely to be concerned about this type of consequence as girls. These findings are consistent with the observations of Elkind (1967) that adolescents, in general, are more self-conscious than children, as it becomes increasingly apparent to them that they are the object of others' evaluations. He described how, as a result, adolescents may attempt to obscure their true selves if they feel that they do not measure up to the standards and values set by others whose opinions are critical. Thus, this is a potential problem for both genders, although there are individual differences within both the boys and girls.

Fear of Looking Too Smart

It has also been claimed that girls, in particular, suppress their opinions within the school setting because they are fearful of looking too smart, which may cause them to risk rejection by their male classmates (Orenstein, 1994). We asked our low-voice high school participants to respond to items that tapped this issue directly (e.g., "I don't say what I think because I don't want to look too smart"). Once again, we found no gender difference supporting the claims that this is merely a problem for girls. Anecdotal reports from within the high school suggest that certain boys are fearful of being considered "nerds," "dorks," or "brains," if they act too smart, risking peer rejection. Once again, individual differences were far more dramatic within each gender group. Thus, fear of appearing too smart is a motivation to suppress one's opinion among certain boys and girls low in voice.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To date, our methodology has been limited to self-report instruments in which adolescents respond to predesigned questionnaire items that tap their perceived ability to express their opinions to a variety of other people. Employing this methodology, we found marked individual differences within each gender, which have been plausibly accounted for by related individual differences in two intervening process variables, perceived level of support and gender orientation. It is this pattern of relationships that we find to be compelling, particularly when replicated across studies. However, might this methodology overestimate or underestimate levels of voice and associated predictors in either boys or girls or in certain individuals? This is certainly a possibility. Our methodology is but one window on these self-processes.

Clearly, the field needs to move in the direction of including a broader spectrum of methods, including interview methodologies, ratings by relevant others (e.g., parents, teachers, and classmates), as well as direct classroom observational procedures in which the dynamics of the interactions between teachers and students, as well as between students, can be observed directly. In particular, we need methodologies that directly examine the links between treatment by teachers and students and outcomes such as level of voice. Coding procedures that allow for sequential analyses in which teachers' or classmates' behaviors can be shown to impact individuals' willingness to express their opinions, demonstrate confidence, and display their curiosity, are needed. Complementary procedures involving self-report questionnaires in which we ask adolescents to identify their perceptions of the links between a given predictor (e.g., teacher or classmate behaviors) and outcomes (e.g., their own level of voice) are also needed. For example, our instrument designed to assess adolescents' perceptions of their motives for suppressing their voices represents a step in this direction (e.g., statements such as "The reason I don't express my opinion with my parents is because they don't really care about or respect what I have to say"). Through such questions, we can examine students' perceptions of the relationship between others' support for voice and adolescents' expression of their opinions, rather than merely inferring it from correlations between self-reported perceptions of support and level of voice.

Gilligan and colleagues have employed interview techniques very effectively, particularly in eliciting some of the underlying dynamics of the voice process. For example, their procedures have revealed the type of active struggle that many girls consciously experience as they face the conflict between remaining faithful to their authentic selves versus silently capitulating to the desires of significant others (Gilligan, personal communication, November 24, 1996). Gilligan's methodology has also revealed that although certain girls may initially acknowledge that they do not have an opinion, upon more extensive discussions after a trusting relationship has been established between the adolescent participants and the interviewer, they will divulge that they do, in fact, have something to say. In future work, therefore, we would like to develop methodologies that would allow us to directly examine the extent to which those who manifestly suppress their opinions are experiencing such inner conflict and distress.

For example, in the interview procedures that we have developed to assess the attributes that characterize the multiple selves of adolescents, we have repeatedly determined that adolescent girls report considerably more conflict among seemingly contradictory attributes across different relationships than do boys (Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey, & Whitesell, in press). Furthermore, the vast majority of conflicting attributes represent clashes between one self-characteristic identified as true self-behavior and one reported to be false. A similar pattern may be observed with regard to the expression of one's opinions. That is, girls and boys at comparably low levels of voice may differ in the extent to which such suppression causes conflict, with girls reporting more conflict, consistent with Gilligan's observations and with the gender differences we have obtained employing our multiple selves procedure.
Clearly, we need to employ multiple methods, and to explore the convergence of findings that different procedures yield. We also need to explore varying definitions of voice, as operationalized in different methodologies. For example, is the voice construct that we have tapped different from the concept of voice initially described by Gilligan and colleagues? Moreover, is voice more likely to be stifled in some content areas than in others? It is highly likely that if the adolescent confronts a topic on which there is potential disagreement, opinions are more likely to be suppressed. In addition, particular topics may be more likely to be avoided because their content is more private or because its expression may be particularly anxiety provoking or potentially damaging to the relationship. The willingness to express particular topics may also interact with either gender or gender orientation, or both. For example, recent findings in our voice studies have revealed that when specifically asked about expressing emotions and personal feelings, boys reported significantly lower levels of voice than did girls. Moreover, those boys who endorsed a masculine (compared to an androgynous) orientation were least able to convey what they felt. These findings are consistent with Gilligan’s speculations on the voice process among boys (see footnote 1). Thus, to move in these various new directions can only enhance our understanding of these critical processes.

The Liabilities of Lack of Voice as a Form of False Self-Behavior

A basic claim of theorists concerned with lack of voice and with false self-behavior is that lack of authenticity has negative outcomes or correlates. Gilligan and colleagues (Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan et al., 1989) as well as others (see Jordan, 1991; Jordan et al., 1991; Lerner, 1993; Miller, 1986; Stiver & Miller, 1988) have observed that suppression of the self leads to lack of zest which, in the extreme form, will be manifest as depressive symptoms and associated liabilities such as low self-esteem. In our earlier work with adolescents (Harter, Marold, et al., 1996) we found that those highest in false self-behavior reported the lowest level of global self-esteem and the most depressive affect. In a recent study of adult relationship styles (Harter et al., in press) we found evidence for a process model in which lack of validation by one’s partner predicted level of authenticity within the relationship, which in turn predicted both depressed affect and self-esteem. Those who felt lack of validation were considerably more likely to report false self-behavior in the relationship, which in turn was associated with depressed affect and low self-esteem.

More recently, in our high school coed sample, we became interested in a new construct and potential correlate of level of voice that we have labelled relational self-esteem. Just as approval, support for voice, and level of voice may vary across relationships, so might self-esteem, in that one may feel more worthwhile as a person in some relationships than in others. Evidence for the validity of the relational self-esteem construct has come from a very clean factor structure, as well as from the discrepancies between individuals’ self-esteem scores across relationships (Harter & Talmi, 1997; Harter, Waters, Whitesell, et al., in press). At the extreme, one student reported her self-esteem to be 1 with parents and 4 with female classmates, the maximum difference possible.

We anticipated that those low in voice within a given relationship would also report low self-esteem within that same relationship. The link may well be bidirectional. That is, failure to express one’s opinions, one’s true self, may erode one’s overall sense of worth as a person. Alternatively, if one’s self-esteem is low, one may feel that one has nothing to say. We examined the relational self-esteem for those with low and with high levels of voice for each relationship, separately. The findings were strikingly comparable for boys and girls (and are therefore combined) across each context. In relationships with parents, low-voice participants had significantly lower self-esteem than did high-voice participants ($M = 2.5$ vs. $M = 3.4$); we found the same pattern in relationships with teachers ($M = 2.8$ vs. $M = 3.3$), male classmates ($M = 2.6$ vs. $M = 3.2$), and female classmates ($M = 2.7$ vs. $M = 3.2$). In addition to the findings for relational self-esteem, similar patterns were obtained for global self-esteem as well as affect (cheerful to depressed). Thus, lack of voice, as a form of false self-behavior, is clearly associated with liabilities that, in turn, may well interfere with the adaptive functioning among adolescents. Converging evidence comes from Kolligian (1990), who reported that perceived fraudulence in adults is accompanied by self-criticism and depressive tendencies.

Double Jeopardy for Girls Who Are to Be Seen and not Heard

Feminist scholars have viewed the suppression of voice as distressing for women, particularly given societal messages to the effect that, in comparison to men, women’s voices are not as valued and their opinions are not taken as seriously. However, when such messages are coupled with communications about how a woman’s looks are potentially her greatest commodity, women who buy into these stereotypes may be doubly at risk for negative outcomes. Adolescent girls and adult women are particularly vulnerable given the punishing standards of attractiveness that are put forth in the media. Standards regarding desirable bodily characteristics such as thinness have become increasingly unrealistic and demanding for women within the past 2 decades (see Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, & Thompson, 1980; Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991).

The difficulty for women of meeting the cultural stereotypes for appearance appears to be brought home over the course of development, the closer one comes to adopting one’s role as a woman in this society. Our own data (Harter,
1993) revealed that for girls, perceptions of physical attractiveness systematically decline with grade level, whereas there is no such drop for boys. In middle childhood, girls and boys feel equally good about their appearance, however, by the end of high school, girls' scores are dramatically lower than boys'. We find similar gender differences in perceived appearance among college populations as well as among adults in the world of work and family, particularly for women who are full-time homemakers.

It is important to realize that not all adolescent girls and women fall victim to this mentality, buying into these media messages. As Pipher (1994) observed, many parents communicate to their daughters their disdain for media images. As parents preoccupied with makeup, clothing, diets, and dating. Such parents do not want their daughters to compromise their authenticity to become popular. However, what are the consequences for those who do adopt the cultural expectations that women should be seen and not heard? We have addressed this issue by dividing female high school students into four groups, based on their levels of voice (high vs. low) crossed with their ratings of the importance of appearance (high vs. low). We examined four correlates, perceptions of appearance, global self-esteem, relational self-esteem, and affect (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, et al., in press).

Across every relationship, those most likely to endorse the view that women should be seen and not heard, namely those low in voice who rated appearance as highly important, reported the worst outcomes. In contrast, those high in voice who reported appearance as relatively unimportant reported the best outcomes, with the other two groups falling in between (manifest in two significant main effects with no interaction). To give one example, those who reported low voice with male classmates and who also touted the importance of appearance, compared to those with high voice who viewed appearance as unimportant, reported lower scores for appearance (M = 2.3 vs. M = 2.9), global self-esteem (M = 2.9 vs. M = 3.4), relational self-esteem (M = 2.65 vs. M = 3.25), and affect (M = 2.9 vs. M = 3.45). The differences were equally dramatic and significant in other relationships (with parents, teachers, and female classmates). Thus, not only does lack of voice bring with it liabilities, but when coupled with an emphasis on the importance of appearance, it places girls in double jeopardy, leading to negative evaluations of both their outer and inner selves.

CONCLUSIONS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Beginning in adolescence, a concern with false self-behavior emerges. A major manifestation of false self-behavior involves the suppression of one's voice, namely the failure to express what one really thinks or believes. We began with a summary of Gilligan's contention that girls' voices are particularly likely to go underground during adolescence, be-

cause to speak one's mind violates society's good woman stereotype and may threaten relationships. However, recent literature within the field of education (AAUW report, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994) has pointed to factors within our educational system that occur developmentally much earlier and could potentially contribute to lack of voice among even younger girls, given claims that schools shortchange girls. Moreover, there are influences outside of the school system, societal expectations, socialization histories, and differential experiences that boys and girls bring to the classroom that could also impact level of voice within the school setting. Thus, we need to approach generalizations with conceptual caution.

For example, nowhere in this literature has it been empirically documented that there are gender differences in levels of voice showing that girls systematically display less voice than do boys, nor has it been demonstrated that most girls lose their voice at adolescence. Thus, arguments that assume or imply gender differences and their developmental course require systematic empirical study. Moreover, claims suggesting that lack of voice is primarily a problem for girls in our society, whether due to general cultural discrimination or potentially linked to gender bias in the classroom, need to be qualified. We can no longer be content with generalizations implying that most or all girls are at risk for lack of voice. Furthermore, we need to attend very seriously to individual differences in level of voice and to identify what causal factors account for lack of voice in some, but not most, or all, girls. Moreover, there has been virtually no attention to individual differences among boys and whether similar or different factors may account for lack of voice in some boys. For both genders, we need to address how potential causes are systematically related to outcomes such as loss of voice, confidence, or self-esteem, that is, we need to document these links directly. To date, we have no documentation of how teachers' interactive styles directly impact these potential consequences. Nor have individual differences in how teachers treat students of both genders, as well as individual students within each gender, been systematically studied.

Our own empirical work has represented an initial attempt to fill in some of these gaps. For example, our results revealed no evidence that girls, in general, lose their voices at adolescence. Rather, they suggest that Gilligan's analysis speaks primarily to a particular subset of adolescent females, namely, feminine girls who report lower levels of voice in public contexts (e.g., at school, with teachers and classmates) but not in more private interpersonal relationships with close friends and parents. In contrast, androgynous girls reported relatively high levels of voice in all contexts. It will be of interest in future research to determine whether the distinction between femininity and androgyny predicts levels of voice in girls prior to adolescence. That is, do feminine girls primarily develop loss of voice at adolescence or might femininity also be a liability even before adolescence? Although, in describing the pattern of findings, we have indicted femininity as the...
liability; in point of fact, it is actually femininity coupled with the absence of masculine attributes that would appear to be detrimental. The combination of both sets of attributes is most conducive to high levels of voice and acceptance by others.

Our primary focus has been the illumination of individual differences within both female and male adolescents. Support for voice among both genders was found to be a powerful predictor. Thus, consistent with our earlier studies, adolescents who feel that they are not validated, in that others show little interest in or support for what they have to say, reported the lowest levels of voice. It is interesting to note that within the classroom context, androgynous girls and boys reported more support for voice from teachers than do feminine girls and masculine boys. Feminine girls also reported lower levels of support than all other groups from classmates, particularly male classmates. These findings alert us to the fact that dynamics within the classroom that involve how students treat each other may be just as potent as how teachers are treating their students. Moreover, our results revealed that teachers do not necessarily treat all girls, or all boys, similarly.

Our findings also provided no evidence for certain gender difference claims that are assumed to underlie girls’ lack of voice, in particular. In asking both female and male adolescents who are low in voice about the reasons why they do not express their opinions, both genders were equally likely to endorse motives that include fear of causing tension in the relationship, self-consciousness and fear of embarrassment, as well as fear of looking too smart. Thus, these appear to represent more generic adolescent issues rather than fears that are unique to girls. However, it would be of interest to examine these processes at subsequent stages of development, to assess this interpretation more directly. Moreover, although we found few gender differences in the self-reported level of voice, it would be interesting in future work to more directly examine the extent to which there may be gender differences in the conflict provoked by the need to stifle one’s opinions.

Why should we be concerned about lack of voice within the school setting? For those individuals of either gender who find it necessary to stifle their opinions, theory and evidence reveals that there are clearly liabilities, particularly when lack of voice is perceived to be false self-behavior. Compromising the self in this fashion is associated with a constellation of negative outcomes including low self-esteem (both global and relational), hopelessness, and depressed affect. Findings from our studies of true and false self-behavior (Harter, Marold, et al., 1996) have also revealed that those engaging in high levels of false self-behavior report that they no longer know who or what their true self is. Thus, as Gilligan has argued, lack of voice does not only involve disconnection from others but disconnection from oneself. Such consequences, in turn, interfere with students’ ability to attend to the academic tasks at hand, to navigate the challenging journey toward the development of mutually satisfying peer relationships, and to develop an identity that will provide a firm psychological foundation for their transition to adulthood.

Moreover, the negative depressive consequences of lack of voice puts the adolescent at risk for self-destructive behaviors, including suicide (see review by Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994). Among adolescents in our samples, the liabilities are greatest for those girls who not only lack voice but who also emphasize the importance of appearance; in focusing on their outer selves, they face formidable hurdles in trying to meet the punishing cultural standards of attractiveness. Thus, those buying into societal messages that women should be seen but not heard are most at risk. The adolescent literature revealed that many such girls are not only at risk for depression but for eating disorders that can be extremely life threatening (see Gross & Rosen, 1988; Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991; Rand & Kuldau, 1992).

What are the educational implications of this package of findings? Perhaps the clearest implication is that students need encouragement, validation, and support for expressing their opinions, both from teachers as well as from classmates. Their voices need to be heard. However, in order for students to be supported for expressing themselves they need the educational opportunities to do so. Models in which teachers merely instruct, handing down the knowledge to be mastered, will do little to support student voices. Rather, as educators within the cooperative learning movement have suggested, students need opportunities, often in smaller groups, to present their ideas in a context where they will be listened to, to be heard, and to be understood (Delpit, 1993; Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Weis & Fine, 1993). Thus, expression of voice must take place within the context of human connection. As Gilligan (1993) has observed, adolescents have a tremendous desire to bring their own inner world of thoughts and feelings into relationships with the thoughts and feelings of others. Maher and Tetreault have concurred, suggesting the need for teachers to view voice as a relational and evolving process. Thus, teachers need to avoid instructional models in which the flow of information is unidirectional. As Delpit has argued, authoritarian teaching styles in which teachers display their power in the classroom and focus primarily on skill learning rob students of the opportunity to express their own ideas and creativity. For Delpit, the teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom because to deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them. As Bartolome (1994) has also observed, a humanizing pedagogy in which teachers build upon the life experiences of students, rather than upon rigid adherence to particular techniques and academic content, will lead students to become more engaged in the learning process.

Listening to others is a powerful form of validation, although not always high on teachers’ list of educational priorities. Increasingly, with accountability criteria and the impor-
tance of scores on standardized tests, teachers are more likely to see their mission as ensuring that students are mastering those skills and memorizing the content of school subjects on which they will be evaluated. And, given economic cutbacks leading to larger numbers of students per classroom, class sizes and physical configurations are not conducive to discussions in which student voices can be expressed, clarified, and respectfully heard by teachers as well as other students. As educational researchers (see Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993) have argued, schools need to thoughtfully reconsider such values and the consequences that emerge, as a result. Moreover, schools need to restructure programs such that they do not continue to foster negative or debilitating gender stereotypes about abilities and social roles (Brophy, 1985; Humberstone, 1990).

As important as it is to have validation from teachers, adolescents need validation from peers. A major challenge in this regard is to create an atmosphere in which male students will seriously listen to the opinions of female students. As we have seen, beginning at an early age, boys either ignore or devalue what girls have to say. With adolescence, feminine girls are particularly at risk, because boys are more likely to focus on the outer selves of such girls, their physical appearance, rather than support them for those personal qualities that comprise their inner selves that are primarily expressed through language. Thus, efforts to encourage adolescents to be sensitive to different voices and different perceptions need validation from peers. A major challenge in schools need to thoughtfully reconsider such values and the consequences that emerge, as a result. Moreover, schools need to restructure programs such that they do not continue to foster negative or debilitating gender stereotypes about abilities and social roles (Brophy, 1985; Humberstone, 1990).

Finally, we need to guard against a singular focus on enhancing girls’ voices. There are also boys in the silent ghetto of the classroom, as our findings have documented. “Reviving Ophelia” (Pipher, 1994) is certainly a worthy goal. However, Hamlet also displayed serious problems of indecision and lack of voice. Thus, efforts to encourage adolescents of both genders to express themselves in ways that will be respectfully heard is a challenge that educators must face if we genuinely want to support the development of students’ authentic selves.

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