The role of single-sex and coeducational instruction on boys' attitudes and self-perceptions of competence in French language communicative activities

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THE ROLE OF SINGLE-SEX AND COEDUCATIONAL INSTRUCTION ON BOYS' ATTITUDES AND SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCE IN FRENCH LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

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Using qualitative research methods, this study looked at the role of the single-sex versus the coeducational school environment as a key factor in determining boys' perceptions of success in French communicative activities as defined in Standard 1.1 of ACTFL 's et al Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century (1999). A total of twenty-four boys (twelve from a single-sex high school and twelve from a coeducational institution) were observed in class and subsequently interviewed. The goal was to determine if cognitive gender differences surrounding foreign language communicative activities, socio-cultural concerns as respects boys' perceptions of the appropriateness of high achievement in French, and teacher pedagogy all lend themselves to the single-sex environment such that it provides a more fertile setting for boys' high achievement. The findings indicated that the single-sex sample's self-perceptions of competence were healthier in the single-sex environment for a variety of reasons. The single-sex school boys were more willing to work hard against the perception held by both sample sets that girls may possess an innate advantage in the speaking skill, they held a wider definition of what is appropriate male behavior (which included high achievement in French), and they (together with their coed counterparts) found the all-boys environment more accepting of errors and more risk-friendly in general - crucial ingredients for developing the French speaking skill. The single-sex sample more

willingly embraced school as a rigorous academic forum, whereas the coed sample was more likely to see school as appropriate for building social skills and for cultivating an understanding of the opposite sex. These findings suggest that the single-sex classroom environment is superior for boys as they strive to achieve in female sex-typed arenas such as French communicative activities.

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behind this endeavor. I hope I have instilled in them what my parents did in me: that we can do anything we set our minds to.

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Chapter I: Statement of the Problem

Introduction

For generations our secondary schools have been the locus of an interesting segregation of sorts, one whose sources may be traced to our brains (the result of a million and a half years of evolution) and to our social environment as well. Whether the answers stem more from our nature or nurture, the question remains: why have female students achieved at a higher level in certain disciplines and males others? Girls historically have outperformed boys in courses that rely on verbal skills: English (creative writing especially), foreign languages, and drama, whereas boys have performed better than girls in the spatially-related disciplines: math, most sciences, and technology. As a foreign language student, I was keenly aware of the preponderance of females in my university classes and especially in the study abroad program in which I participated, where I was one of five boys in a group with 42 girls. As a male foreign language teacher, I continued to be part of the minority. A review of the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association membership listing (2005-2006) confirms a dominance by women in this state's chief foreign language association. Women were by far the majority of presenters at the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages conference in November of 2005 in Baltimore. Much the same can be said of males in the fields of physics and computer science, as well as in the professional areas of engineering and architecture. Whether innate or socialized, something is afoot that renders these fields more palatable to one gender over the other. There is evidence (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Salomone, 2003; Sax, 2001) that shows as well that the secondary single-sex

environment offsets, partially at least, these effects and that both males and females feel more comfortable achieving in these cross-gender disciplines alone, without the presence of the other. Perhaps this is due to less self-consciousness in the absence of the other gender. It may be also that the preponderance of same-sex role models, their teachers and even fellow students, tends to address student needs better in single-sex education. Is it simply easier to teach to one learning style (male or female) than to two, as Gurian (2003) and Sax (2001) suggest? Have adolescents of both genders allowed these stereotypes to dictate how they act and react to one another, so that each defers to the other without sufficient justification in their respective domains? I am intrigued by these questions and to what degree they pertain to foreign language acquisition for boys.

Problem Statement

As a former Romance language teacher of young adults, I felt a natural inclination to investigate this issue from my expertise; hence, my study focused on boys' self-perceptions as language learners, specifically with regard to Standard 1.1 of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, American Association of Teachers of French, American Association of Teachers of German, American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese; 1999), set forth by the foremost foreign language pedagogical organizations in the United States. Standard 1.1 emphasizes the communicative skill, declaring that students who meet this standard can "...engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and

exchange opinions"(p. 9). Therefore I sought to determine whether boys felt their needs would be better served in single-sex or coed environments.

It was important then that I understand the subtle undercurrents that flow through adolescent perceptions about these languages. Italian and French are considered by many to be the prototypical "Romance" languages; those that brought prominence to Romance literature (*un roman* is French for *a novel*) and Romanesque painting, sculpture, and architecture during the Renaissance. Beautifully lyrical with a soft cadence and rhythm (as opposed to the hard, guttural and staccato German) with celebrated histories in the literary theme of romance, both languages bear a distinctly "feminine" appeal. Spanish and Portuguese, as new world languages, are regarded somewhat differently by American culture and in turn by adolescents. Less effeminate and more clearly tied to the working class image than the aristocratic (as are French and Italian, through their European histories), they are more readily accepted by adolescent boys as appropriate (Carr & Pauwels, 2006) when compared to French and Italian. Given that French and Spanish are the most widely taught modern languages in the U.S. (Draper and Hicks, 2002; Welles, 2004), it made sense for me to use these as the basis of my study. The evidence however may well have been more conclusive as regards French than Spanish, since socio-cultural issues (discussed in depth in Chapter Two) that detract from French's appeal to many boys may severely impact their desire to excel in the language.

The perceptions then that boys have regarding foreign language learning and themselves as learners are indeed pivotal in their achievement, given that students must feel an authentic, practical use to what they learn in the classroom if they are to approach their potential as students (Gordon, 1998). We have all heard the refrain,

"History/Math/Foreign Language class is useless... what am I going to do with it?" When students, particularly boys (Lawrie and Brown, 1992), see a practical need for the material, they strive that much harder to attain mastery. If students (or in this case, boys) feel that the material is too effeminate, or that it is the traditional domain of women (as so many activities that are rooted in communication seem to be), they are not likely to value achievement in it. Where there is no value, there will be little effort, aside from that which enables the student to "get by" in the course. It seems clear that where there are two genders present, there will be particular heed paid to these gender roles, such that the single-sex environment would have a different effect on an adolescent learning Romance languages. In all-male schools, boys are much less likely to feel the social pressures that the coed environment brings (Hulse, 1997). Interviewing boys and observing them in both the single-sex and coed classroom settings provided the data for this comparative study.

As a former foreign language teacher who is a product of an all-boys high school, I was particularly intrigued by the question of boys and the foreign language classroom. What perceptions did boys from the single-sex environment have of themselves as learners of foreign language? Were these perceptions and their attitudes about foreign language acquisition enhanced by the single-sex experience? If so, did this enable them to achieve at a higher level? The larger issue alluded to above is what role does educational environment play in determining student career paths in all fields? Would single-sex education further open the fields of physics and engineering to girls, and foreign language to boys? As ironic as this sounds to anyone familiar with Title IX, could single-sex education be part of the answer to true parity in these academic disciplines, which would

in turn level the playing field in their respective professions? These questions are worthy of further research, and are broached again in Chapter Five. For the purposes of this study, I investigated the effects of single-sex and coeducation on boys' perceptions of themselves and their level of competence as communicators in the foreign language classroom, with possible ramifications for a later study tying in the young male's general under-achievement in this field as a consequence of his self-image and confidence level.

Using the 2005 Advanced Placement test scores as a baseline for interest in French and Spanish, one finds female dominance in participation in AP programs in French and Spanish with Latin and German (i.e. the non-Romance AP languages) scores included for the sake of comparison:

Table 1: Participation in 2005 AP Exams

Exam	% Girls	% Boys
French language	70	30
French literature	72	28
Spanish language	65	35
Spanish literature	68	32
Latin	50	50
German	49	51

My purpose in including data on Latin and German participation on AP exams was to draw a distinction between perceptions of Romance languages vs. non-Romance languages taught in American schools. Given that German and Latin have AP tests, they were ideal for this role. In addition, these participation figures provided a contrast that indirectly supported the point asserted earlier that Romance languages have generally borne a feminine stigma with both the adolescent American male and female (Clark,

1995; Ormerod, 1975). Latin, with its history of Roman conquest (so much of Latin literature, poetry, and simple workbook exercises glorify the rigorous existence of the Romans: warfare, agriculture, and civics) appeals to boys, and may recommend itself naturally to them as a "dead" (i.e. non-verbal) language; one does not *speak* Latin. Consequently, the hurdle that is Standard 1.1, i.e. the use of conversation to exchange information, opinions, and as a means to express emotion, is practically speaking a non-issue in the study of Latin. De-emphasizing the verbal and listening skills which have long been regarded as female skills (Riordan, 1990) may make this language more palatable to the average boy. German is a strong, guttural language, which like Latin uses declensions that bring an almost mathematical (i.e. spatial) skill into play. Its history of conflict, particularly World Wars I and II also appeals to boys. Thus, it could be that these attractive characteristics are enough to enable boys to overcome the challenges of Standard 1.1.

We can discern from the data discrepancy between boys' participation in Romance languages and in Latin and German that a significantly higher percentage of boys are interested in the latter two than the former. Data from the 2005 exams for passing scores (three to five), and attaining mastery (score of five) mirror these participation scores, although the boys' mastery of German is nevertheless well below that of the girls (45% vs. 55%) despite their slight majority in participation. Also notable is the pattern that develops between the French and Spanish language exams and their respective literature exams: in both cases, the boys' participation is higher in the language exam than in the literature exam. This provides support for the general belief that girls possess a cognitive advantage in the reading comprehension skill (Halpern, 2000) as well

as a deeper interest in the activity, which manifests itself in higher achievement in literature courses.

Although these data provide only a passing glance at interest levels, it is easy to assume that a high level of interest will reflect a perception that the discipline is appropriate and worthy of high achievement. As we will see, various cognitive, socio-cultural, and pedagogical factors all play a part in posing challenges to boys and their achievement in the French communicative skill.

Research Questions

What are boys' perceptions and attitudes of themselves as Romance language learners, and specifically as communicators? What are their perceptions of the impact of the gender of fellow students and the gender the teacher? What do they believe contributes to these perceptions?

Theoretical Rationale

One of the intriguing sub-topics of the single-sex education vs. coeducation debate is that of the perceptions that secondary students have regarding which courses are the "domain" of males or of females, i.e. the concept that literature, creative writing, foreign languages, theater, and chorus, are "feminine," and math, science, and technology are "masculine." Brain research indicates that there may be something to this, that boys may be more endowed inherently with spatial potential, and girls likewise with verbal abilities (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Kimura, 1987). The vast majority of experts agree that if this is so, it in no way is an indication that we cannot all learn equally in all fields.

It does however raise interesting questions about the need to counteract the generalizations that plague students' attitudes about learning. Some believe the single-sex educational environment may represent a major step forward in eradicating these harmful attitudes that not only affect student performance in school, but ripple through our society by reducing gender diversity among professionals in these fields.

Cornelius Riordan (1990), a leading expert on the issue of single-sex education and its effects claims that certain talents in school are generally viewed as feminine (e.g. good reading skills) and masculine (good math/science skills) by *both* genders, thus incompatible with their sex-roles. Understandably, where there is the adolescent perception that what one is doing is emulative of the other gender, the discomfort may adversely affect the child's desire to achieve, particularly when that other gender makes up half the class roster. In a single-sex environment, this discomfort is drastically reduced since these students pay less attention to these stereotypical roles (Connell, 1996), due in part to the absence of the other gender. In an interesting study, Klainin and Fensham (1986) showed a reverse trend to these traditional sex-roles patterns: in Nigeria and England, elementary school boys outpaced girls in reading, to which they attributed to the fact that a considerable number of male reading teachers work in those two countries. This underlies the importance of teachers as models and the need to undo the "ripple" effect cited above to combat the problem. Riordan (1990) believes that such gender-based perceptions can be more easily reversed when the classroom expert, the teacher, is of the "non-traditional" gender.

Michael Gurian (2001) claims that boys and girls have distinct learning styles, with the former calling on right brain functions (spatial skills) more often and the latter

preferring left brain functions (verbal skills). He goes on to stress however that there is substantial crossover and that many things in each brain and personality can outweigh gender differences. The evidence suggests that in single-sex environments, girls pay little heed to the perception that math and science are "masculine" disciplines (Haag, 1998), nor do boys to the perception that reading, writing, and foreign languages are "feminine" (Hulse, 1997). If the concept of general gender learning styles (right brain for boys vs. left brain for girls) in tandem with cognitive advantages for one gender over the other dependent on the academic discipline holds true, one has to see a friendlier and more agreeable environment for boys in the all-boys Romance language classroom given that the product they receive will be better tailored to their needs.

Christine Hoff Sommers (2000) agrees that many of the male/female differences are "not conditioned but rather innate (p.86)," with males better at spatial reasoning (mental rotation) which leads to enhanced performance in geometry, engineering, architecture, and females superior in the verbal self-expression side. Hoff Sommers adds this proviso, in line with the conventional thinking of the cognitive experts, when she quotes anthropologist/biologist Lionel Tiger: "Biology is not destiny but it is a good statistical probability (p.89)." She touches on the effects of teaching styles as well which may reinforce or help to perpetuate the issues, citing a British study by Bray, Gardner, and Parsons, (1997) that indicated progressive teaching styles may hinder boys while helping girls. Boys, they argue, learn better via the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy, whereas girls have benefited more than boys from cooperative learning techniques.

Bray et al (1997) also claim that in coed environments, boys are loathe to express opinions for fear of appearing feminine. Given that Communication Standard 1.1

(ACTFL et al., 1999) includes the exchange of opinions, Bray's findings would appear to handicap boys as they attempt to master this communicative benchmark. In Chapter Two, discussion of Standard 1.1 as it relates to difficulties boys encounter in expressing their feelings and emotions is elaborated as well. Bray goes on to assert that boys are far less likely than girls to read for pleasure, and that they have been hurt by the removal of competition, from spelling bees to class rank. At all boys' schools, there are predominantly male teachers who teach a range of interests without causing the boys to feel they are risking their masculinity. In one class in this study, 75% of the students were involved in the music and art program, evidence again that boys feel freer to undertake classes and extra-curricular activities which in a coed environment are so often associated with the female domain.

Sax (2005) laments that smaller percentages of boys study art, advanced foreign language, and music, and girls are following suit with lower enrollments in advanced math, computer science, and physics. Sax, a physician as well as a Ph.D. in psychology, supports the claim of a female's innate verbal advantage, asserting that it may be due to the fact that she uses both brain hemispheres for language whereas boys typically use only the left. This is not an assertion of an inevitable verbal superiority on the part of females or a scientific edge for males, simply an admission that their brains function differently. Indeed, Dr. Sax goes to great lengths to point out that "Boys and girls can all achieve at the same level...we just need to teach them differently" (pp. 32-33). Gender blind education then has funneled boys away from art, advanced foreign languages, music, and creative writing, while directing girls away from physics, computer science, and advanced math. In single-sex educational environments, boys do well in traditionally

female dominated subjects and vice-versa. Where there is success in any endeavor, a higher self-perception will naturally follow.

Rosemary Salomone, in her book Same, Different, Equal (2003) marvels at the success of the all-girls *Young Women's Leadership School* in New York City, and with this simple statement captures deep meaning: "At coed schools, rarely would a girl play the saxophone or trombone...(p.31)" They are plentiful at YWLS. Salomone states that although innate abilities for the sexes appear to exist, they may also provide momentum for both sexes to lean further toward that role – "cultural lore" (p. 103) she calls it, that women do have "women's intuition," and men are good with directions, where nature and nurture reinforce each other. Boys and girls then may be circumventing their own potential successes in these non-traditional disciplines simply because they believe what their culture tells them, that *this* discipline is man's work and *that* is woman's. Her belief then is that in a single-sex environment, neither gender will be faced with an inferior position, and will feel free to pursue whatever courses one chooses. Brain differences and gender specific learning styles between boys and girls could be treated more effectively through single-sex education, so that we might have more female physicists and male foreign language interpreters. Salomone states clearly that the advantages of single-sex education for girls include enhanced performance in math, science, and technology, with boys "...more favorably inclined toward drama, biology, and languages" (p. 207). She adds that women's colleges award more degrees in the sciences and math than coed institutions – clear evidence of the need to provide a single-sex outlet to students who want to excel in disciplines dominated by their opposite gender counterparts. Diane Hulse (1997) found that with single-sex education boys were less apt to succumb to social

pressures, and more open to a wider definition of masculinity, i.e. they may be more likely to pursue non-traditional courses of study and perceive themselves as competent learners in those fields.

Boys' attitudes then about what are appropriate fields of study are crucial in their level of achievement. Fields with practical application, e.g. science and math, have always enjoyed high status among boys (Dawson and O'Connor, 1991). Boys that I have spoken to informally claim that Spanish is more popular among males because it is a more *practical* language, spoken by approximately a half billion people. The world's best scientists and mathematicians have always been problem-solvers, men of brilliance, men to be emulated, doers more than talkers. Becoming proficient in foreign language, like being a good reader, actor, or artist, is not in line with an adolescent male's traditional view of what it is to be masculine. Hence, boys are less inclined to want to excel, attaching less importance to foreign language than do girls (Clark & Trafford, 1996). If as Hulse says boys in all-boys schools have a wider definition of what is appropriate for them than boys in coed schools do, then non-traditional courses of study such as Romance languages, poetry, and art represent another realm in which to excel.

Finally, Sparks, Artzer, Ganschow, Seibenhar, Plageman, and Patton (1998) found that foreign language acquisition follows many of the same processing patterns as native language learning, which leads to an historical advantage for females, given that it is a verbal skill. Barton (2002) found that foreign language grades for boys in single-sex environments were considerably higher than those in coed (particularly for French students), adding, "Researchers...have singled out French as the subject in which girls' and boys' performance may be enhanced in single-sex classes" (p. 8). The connection

here may well be that a perceived discrepancy between how one gender fares when compared to another can have serious consequences on self-perceptions as learners in that discipline. If I sense, justifiably or not, that girls are naturally better equipped to achieve at a high rate in the Romance language classroom than I, my perceived efficacy as a student in that class will likely suffer.

Significance of Study

For hundreds of years, America has endeavored to provide its citizens with opportunity – the chance to reach one's potential in a free and equitable society. This of course has not always been true, particularly for women and minorities. In fact, given the same talent and work ethic, attaining one's highest goals has often been easier for some than for others. Equality for the downtrodden has always begun with education, so it stands to reason that we must again call on education to rectify this inequity. When we have an educational system that, consciously or not, directs males one way and females another, we invest in a cycle of unfairness and help to guarantee it. For generations, men have taught boys and girls advanced science and, with rare exceptions, only the boys have moved on to become experts in the field (e.g. men teaching boys and girls advanced science), and the same is true of women in foreign language fields. Single-sex education may provide a safe environment for fostering growth in those students who buck the trend. There is much wasted potential in a system that discourages young people from following a course of study or a trade based simply on gender. The first step then is to eradicate the prevalent concept that certain disciplines belong to girls and others to boys, because it is this obstacle that harms children of both genders as they attempt to achieve

in these non-traditional disciplines. Many boys come to the creative writing class, the Romance language class, or the art class with a pre-established sense of inadequacy, believing that they are at an innate disadvantage and will have to struggle to keep up. Those that *do* keep up do so at their own peril; classmates may demand to know "why their accent is so good in French," or "why they write poems?" The peer group, heavily influenced by Coleman's (1961) "adolescent culture," can be rigid and unforgiving about what is appropriate school behavior for boys and girls. Fear of being labeled unfairly for aspiring to achieve outside the perceived realm of appropriateness is a real threat, and can have a severe impact on a young person's desire to perceive himself as a competent learner. If we believe as Hulse does that the peer group applies less pressure in a single-sex environment than in a coed one with regard to this phenomenon, it must follow that the adolescent boy's self-perceptions as a learner of Romance language are enhanced in the all-boys setting.

If boys do in fact thrive in Romance language acquisition in the single-sex setting, who is to say that other traditional areas of weakness for both boys and girls cannot be better addressed in the single-sex environment? Many schools offered all-girls math classes with much success in the 80's and 90's as a means to close the math gender gap as well. Sadker & Sadker (1995) found that when girls and boys did computer work together, boys tended to wrest control of the machine from the girls who in turn would passively relinquish it. Those girls could undoubtedly benefit from the more welcoming environment the single-sex setting represents. This of course will be a topic for a subsequent discussion in Chapter Five under "Implications for Further Research."

Design of Research

Given that my goal was to ascertain student self-perceptions as Romance language learners, the qualitative method seemed most appropriate, since it allowed me to obtain, analyze, and understand my subjects' beliefs and opinions about themselves and how these related to their learning environment. This comparative, qualitative study then was based on partially structured interviews with Romance language students of a private, suburban all-boys school and a public suburban coed school, triangulated by classroom observations. All of my student samples were male, high school age, Caucasian or Asian students of like economic backgrounds.

One-on-one interviews suited my needs more than focus groups, as the topics of discussion at times wandered into social or gender issues that rendered some boys slightly uncomfortable and may have caused staged answers had they been in the presence of other boys. Boys are prone to overestimating their abilities (Riordan 1990) and such false bravado would have seriously hampered my goals. For example, a young man in private conversation with an adult may be more inclined to admit feeling inadequate as a speaker of Spanish in a mixed classroom, whereas to admit it among a roomful of male peers could have social consequences. A male student in a coed environment might more readily lament dropping French in a one-on-one conversation than in a focus group, whose collective stare might remind him precisely why he dropped it in the first place – peer pressure. The advantage of the focus group approach, specifically that individuals can feed off each other's contributions and contribute in kind, would be offset by the presence of the peer group and the boys' hesitancy to reveal themselves. Although Krathwohl (1998) claims that focus group participants who *do*

speak out on sensitive topics can release "the inhibitions of others who might not do so in a one-on-one situation..." (p. 295), my sense is that this is truer of adult groups than of adolescents.

I had initially feared that in the event I could not be present to conduct classroom observations due to time constraints – entirely plausible at either venue given the nature of teacher schedules and workdays, I would have had to arrange to video-record the classes. Fortunately, this was not an issue and I was present in classes to observe my subjects in each case. I feel I am a capable note-taker and as such was a more effective recorder of events than the camera. Furthermore, the presence of another adult in the room I thought resulted in a smoother transition period than did a camera. As we know, people are known to engage in "grandstanding" and other irrelevant behavior before a camera (just watch the crowd react to a foul ball in its vicinity), which could have seriously hindered my data set for that class. I believe it was much better to commit to one method; for me it was live observations with videotaping as the emergency back-up.

Data from both sources was coded so as to determine patterns of meaning that emerged, interviews were transcribed in full, and students were asked to review the transcriptions to ensure not only written accuracy but to allow for elaboration where appropriate.

Finally, subjects were provided with a written explanation of the project, assured of their anonymity, and compensated appropriately for their participation.

Limitations of the Study

Some of the concepts upon which this study is based assert the existence of a

male/female binary, or a twofold model of human behavior and tendencies that are generally based on gender. The two most prevalent concepts are specifically cognitive/brain-based and socio-cultural gender differences. As respects the latter, there is recognition that as a result of our socio-cultural system, boys and girls may indeed become different as they grow up, are exposed to it, and influenced by it. The cognitive side is more problematic however in that it could be construed as an essentialist argument, that is, that there are distinct, stable, biological differences between men and women - they are in *essence* different. It may be that even those innate cognitive gender differences I outline in the next chapter have resulted from hundreds of thousands of years of socio-cultural influence, that brain development followed and evolved based on male/female socio-cultural roles, that nature truly is dependent on nurture, and that despite the evidence cited, these differences are transitory. In any event, the claims I make are not intended to convey a rigid adherence to the essentialist argument, as the evidence indicates significant crossover of brain type between the genders that would seem to refute the concept of distinct differences along strict gender lines.

Although I intended to screen participants in my study to establish a sample that typically performs in the normal range so as to control the outlier question, ultimately this proved impractical. Many teachers believe that the most outstanding students could teach themselves, and although I do not embrace this theory wholeheartedly (even the best can be challenged to do more), it may be true that the top-notch students are impervious to the gender environment, i.e. they would excel and have high self-perceptions in either setting. True enough, I believe; however, my coed sample class had only twelve male students, consequently I was forced to alter this strategy and involve students from two

classes using a random sample model.

As alluded to above, much of the literature regarding the differences *between* boys and girls and their learning claims that they are dwarfed by the differences between all individuals. In other words, although such gender-based findings do exist, each individual's potential to be distinct from the next, whether they share his/her gender or not, is greater still. Despite an attempt to achieve saturation in my interviewing, my sample could have been adversely affected by a group of eclectic boys whose differences were greater than their similarities.

Given that my all-boys school sample was from a private school, and my coed school sample was from a public school, there may be some claim to a lack of consistency therein. Since public single-sex schools are so rare, and those that do exist have demographics so radically different from those of my coed school, I have attempted to find a public school that shares many of the private school's characteristics: high academic standards, practically 100% of its graduates continuing on to college, comparable socio-economic scales, and so on. I am confident that the schools in question were sufficiently similar to control this question.

Finally, as a male who used his single-sex secondary experience as a springboard to excellence in Romance languages, I may have come to this project with some measure of researcher bias. My senses tell me that what I have experienced is the norm, that the single-sex experience lends itself to boys' improved self-perceptions as learners of Romance language, so I endeavored to follow the data with the integrity of an effective researcher. Part of this integrity included conducting my interviews so that the respondents felt no inclination to "tell me what I wanted to hear."

Study Overview

In Chapter One I endeavor to establish an historical and contemporary framework for the issue of boys and Romance language achievement. Also contained therein are the study's focus, research questions which led the study, a theoretical rationale which justifies the work, a research design overview, and an outline of the study's possible limitations. Chapter Two tends to those issues, namely brain-based gender differences, foreign language pedagogy, socio-cultural issues, and the debate over single-sex versus coeducation, which overlap at the common juncture of my research problem of boys, their self-perceptions as learners of Romance languages, and their instructional environments. Chapter Three outlines in detail my choice of methodology, my rationale for choosing it, my sample characteristics, data gathering techniques and analysis. Chapter Four presents findings resulting from my data collection and analysis, and Chapter Five discusses those findings as they relate to the literature review and the research questions.

Conclusion

In addition to investigating the appropriateness of single-sex education as a means to improve boys' self-perceptions as Romance language learners, I believe this study highlights the need to adjust our pedagogy to our learners' needs – differentiated instruction as we know it today, but not just by student readiness or interest, but by gender-based learning style as well. As discussed above, there is evidence of these brain differences that needs to be recognized and acted on via varied teaching methods.

Separating boys and girls in the foreign language classroom might be a partial strategy, as may be differentiated instruction based on gender-specific learning characteristics.

It is my hope that more studies will follow in the area of brain research and brain differences between males and females, since this remains a relatively new field on which so much depends if we are to improve education and career options for both genders. A look at single-sex classes in certain disciplines within coed schools would seem to offer a good compromise that would have fewer disadvantages than outright single-sex schools, and may be easier to justify. Whether it is girls who are shortchanged or boys in our secondary school system, research supports that single-sex education is a viable, worthwhile option for both genders for many reasons; the topic of my research is but one of them.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

The issue of boys and their self-perceptions as learners and communicators of Romance languages is a multi-faceted one to say the least, drawing from a number of important sub-issues. What are some of the contributing factors to how boys view themselves in the Romance language classroom? Certainly foreign language pedagogy is important. How we go about cultivating second language acquisition in our students is instrumental to their success, a success which in turn breeds confidence in the learner and improves his self-image in the discipline. Socio-cultural issues also play a large part in shaping boys' self-perceptions as Romance language learners. High performance in Romance languages, particularly French or Italian, may run counter to the typical boy's opinion of what is appropriate for a male, i.e. he may regard it as too effeminate. Riordan (1990) claims that youth culture does not value feminine ideals, viewing them as suggestive of weakness. Single-sex education may also play a role, providing boys with an environment free of many of the socio-cultural drawbacks inherent in the coeducational system, and affording Romance language teachers the opportunity to tailor their teaching to boys' particular learning styles. Do boys in fact share collective characteristics as learners? This is part of the fourth component that shall be investigated,

and since cognition and brain development begin before any of the aforementioned three do, let's begin there, with the cognitive side.

Male and Female Cognition

Innate brain differences between males and females have been recognized for generations, but the recent explosion of brain research, due in part to technological advances like brain scanning and imaging, have allowed cognitive experts to view the brain at work. What they have seen and now assert is that much of what was previously regarded as stereotype has a basis in truth. Gender is not simply a social function accompanied by certain physiological differences – it is characterized by brain differences as well, which manifest themselves in how and where the brain stores, processes, and synthesizes information.

Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) found females had higher natural verbal abilities than males, a trait which was the result of or resulted in a greater importance placed in good inter-personal relationships. Boys, in contrast, held a quantitative advantage which aided in problem-solving and mastering situations requiring applied logic. The traditional stereotypes then of the loquacious female semi-dependent on her social relationships for fulfillment, and the taciturn male, quietly plugging away with little need of social interaction were not so farfetched after all. Kimura (2002) claims that brain differentiation, that is, the formatting of the brain by either the feminine or masculine model, occurs soon after *conception*, i.e. the brain is wired the masculine or feminine way long before the "nurture" side of life comes into play. She concurs with Maccoby and Jacklin, finding males stronger in quantitative reasoning in addition to spatial tests.

Females enjoy a more balanced and distributed speech function, using both hemispheres of the brain for language processing and production, whereas men generally use only the left.

Most experts agree that one phenomenon has led to this brain differentiation in males and females: evolution. Kimura (1987) asserts that 500,000 years ago males were applying their spatial talents to the hunt, allowing them to venture far from home in search of food. Route-finding and memory skills were invaluable in this essential survival task in that they enabled a wider search and the assurance of finding the way back home. Females, as the gatherers of roots and other plant food, had to be able to recall where the best plants grew, and recognize the nutritious from the poisonous. Eals and Silverman (1994) found that *this* spatial "memory" was stronger in women, and aided them in their return to particular food-gathering spots. The men, pursuing a mobile quarry, had less need of this skill since their prey was constantly on the move.

Female tasks revolved around smaller group efforts, as compared to male tasks, which were larger in scale. After gathering food and returning to camp, the women would tend to the internal living space (cleaning, arranging, preparing food), often cooperating in pairs or small groups, which contributed to their development of the verbal skills. As the primary caretakers, women had to be able to read their children's expressions, distinguish the "hungry" cry from the "frustrated" cry, both of which are very much "sensory and verbal occupations" (Gurian, 2001; p. 38). They possessed superior perceptual discrimination and color identification skills, which were helpful in determining everything from which berries were edible to when to separate bickering siblings. Are these evolutionary traits from untold millennia present today? Boyatzis,

Chazan, and Ting (1993) and Gurian (2001) found that baby girls even as young as several months are superior to boys in reading/recognizing facial expressions, and distinguishing sounds. This is the beginning of a lifelong advantage that females will have over males in the verbal/sensory domain.

There is then much of what Salomone (2003) terms "cultural lore" (p. 103) in western culture, that is, that males, for example, are good with directions (spatial skill) but need their wives' help in choosing a tie (sensory skill). The research of many experts including those cited above though indicates that this "lore" may be based on some truth; males with their superior spatial skills *are* better with directions and females *are* better at discerning color patterns. What then of the exceptions? Many males are in the business of color schemes – interior decorating for example, and numerous females work in construction or carpentry. As discussed above, Kimura (1987) asserts that brain differentiation takes place shortly after conception, when the brain's processing system locks into either the masculine or feminine format, depending on the amount of testosterone introduced. If the individual has a weak androgen content (androgen contains testosterone), or the brain is somehow non-reactive to it, the potential for a "female" brain is born. Conversely, a strong measure of testosterone establishes "male" brain wiring (Collaer & Hines, 1995). Given the fact that this brain differentiation and the genital/sexual differentiation are not often simultaneous, it is not uncommon to have males with female wiring, and females with the male wiring (Kimura, 1987). Thus, the tendency to point out the homosexual community as debunking the entire premise of brain differences by gender may be explained simply: some men and women are

endowed with the opposite-gender brain wiring. That said, it is important to note that "brain wiring" is not in itself any clear indication of sexual preference.

Harvard psychiatry professor Jill Goldstein (2005) concurs with the claim that male brains are better spatially and in quantitative reasoning terms, whereas women do better on virtually all verbal tasks. Linn and Petersen (1985) found that males typically possess a spatial advantage over females that is substantial in three-dimensional mental rotation tasks, small to moderate in spatial perception tasks, and small in two-dimensional rotation tasks. Hyde, Fennema, and Lamon (1990) assert that on the quantitative side, high school and college age males possess a generally small to moderate edge over females in overall ability, including complex problem-solving. Dr. Goldstein made clear in her remarks that although sexual dimorphism (i.e. boys generally are more spatially inclined and girls generally are more verbally inclined) of the brain is the rule, the differences are greater within each sex than outside, a sentiment commonly cited by most cognitive experts. In other words, there are greater verbal disparities between individual girls, and likewise larger spatial differences between individual boys than there are between the genders as a whole. Gurian (2001) and Collaer & Hines (1995) agree, stating that although boys lean toward the male wired brain and girls the female, there is considerable crossover. Although the cognitive experts believe that no gender possesses exclusivity in high performance in any field, these differential patterns do exist and in a general way can be attributed to each sex. Halpern (2000) supports this claim: "Evidence from a variety of sources supports the finding that, on average, females have better verbal abilities than males (p. 93)..." and "...male superiority on tasks requiring spatial abilities is among the most persistent of individual differences...(p.101)"

Having thus attempted to establish that there do exist significant brain differences between males and females, I will focus on those that are particularly germane to my topic of Romance language acquisition, that is, verbal skills. Smolak (1986) and McGuiness (1976) found that females as young as one year old are already more verbally proficient than their male peers, noting that they speak one month sooner on average than do boys and can articulate longer utterances. Females' vocabulary banks are consistently larger than males' beginning at an early age as well, with girls at sixteen months maintaining a thirteen-word advantage, increasing to a fifty-word advantage four months later and a 115 word advantage at 24 months (Huttenlocher, Haight, Bryk, Seltzer, & Lyons, 1991). Of additional interest is that the researchers found no correlation between these results and the amount the mothers had spoken to their children. Their conclusion, in their own words, is that "gender differences in early vocabulary growth seem to reflect early capacity differences" (Huttenlocher et al., 1991, p. 245). Incorporating new vocabulary, crucial building blocks in communication, is of course pivotal in learning a language, whether it is the mother tongue or a second language. If this vocabulary advantage does indeed continue through the adolescent years, as it appears it does, the implications are rather serious for young men who are assessed in the Romance language classroom in part based on their ability to learn, retain, and actively utilize new vocabulary.

Horgan (1975) learned that verbal differences favoring girls were present in utterances of more than four words for children as early as two and a half to four years, and that girls were much more likely to use advanced linguistic constructs like the passive voice (e.g. "Mommy, the bike wheel *was broken.*") and participles (e.g. "Where's

the *mixing* bowl?"). In a 1987 Martin and Hoover study, the researchers found that girls maintain a consistent advantage through middle school in virtually all verbal aspects, accounting for two thirds of the highest scores in eighth grade on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Hines (1990) found an enormous difference in girls' and boys' abilities to produce synonyms, a basic indicator of the richness of language one possesses. Catalán (2003) found that girls employ significantly more vocabulary acquisition strategies in foreign language learning (L2) than do boys, a condition that bears obvious ramifications for the Romance language classroom. Females appear to enjoy a distinct advantage in writing skills as well according to Halpern (2000), who uses data from the U.S. Department of Education to assert that girls had a substantial and stable advantage over boys in writing skills for grades four, eight, and eleven for writing proficiency tests administered in 1984, 1988, and 1990. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2004) asserts that "females in grades 4, 8, and 12 have consistently outperformed males in reading" (p. 4). Such differences in verbal achievement have been recorded internationally as well, with the G8 countries releasing similar data indications (Freeman, 2004)

The female's natural verbal advantage then refers to practically all elements of language: fluency in speaking, synonym generation, grammar, reading comprehension, writing, etc. The one exception, interestingly enough, is in verbal analogies where males seem to be able to apply their spatial skills to verbal realm problems like "Thanksgiving is to turkey as Halloween is to...candy." Halpern (2000) believes there is some mental representation in analogies that makes use of the spatial or logic skills that males possess, thus allowing them to outdo females in this subset of the verbal skill. In a similar fashion, females outpace males in math word problems, which require some verbal skill, and

computation, which makes use of females' superior memory for words/objects. The latter example simply stated, a pupil's knowledge of "9 X 8 = 72" may be less quantitative reasoning and more synonymous memorization (as in the memorization that *enormous* = *vast*) than we think.

As mentioned above, part of the female's overall verbal advantage is in the aural domain. Cone-Wesson and Ramirez (1997) cite evidence that shows girls as young as several days with superior hearing skills and ability to discern sounds, both of which would have significant implications in the foreign language classroom. John Corso's classic 1959 study asserted that the female aural advantage increases as boys and girls grow older, suggesting that the common complaint of adolescent girls that their fathers are always yelling (and the fathers' counter-claims that they are not) may be a result of this hearing differential: Dad simply wants to project in a strong clear voice, and his daughter can't justify the volume. Conversely, the female Romance language teacher working with the male student is equally problematic. Female teachers, with naturally softer voices, may have trouble projecting to the male student at the back of the class. Difficulty making out a foreign language utterance, or trouble hearing the teacher at all would undermine any student's success. A teacher who gives instructions in a foreign language (generally the norm in today's second language instructional approach) may unwittingly assume the boy doesn't understand the words, when in actuality he simply hasn't heard them. Sax (2005) claims this may partially explain why boys make up the large majority of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) cases, since continuously straining to hear and understand taxes the individual's concentration level, inevitably resulting in a loss of focus and a tendency to give up. Halpern (2000) discusses myriad examples from

the lower end, where boys constitute the larger part of those afflicted with stuttering and dyslexia, to reading skills, where adolescent boys routinely run two, sometimes three years behind their female peers. Girls acquire language at a younger age and a more rapid rate, and they maintain the advantage on numerous criteria (e.g. generation of synonyms, mastery of advanced linguistic forms, writing tasks, etc.) throughout their lives.

As previously mentioned, much of the female's advantage in the verbal side stems from the fact that she uses both brain hemispheres in exercising her verbal skills, whereas males are more inclined to use only the left (Sax, 2005). Furthermore, when we simply look at each gender's left-brain language abilities, we see that the female's are more focally concentrated than the male's, whose capacities are more diffusely spread (Kimura, 1987); certainly the more focused concentration of any ability represents more powerful and efficient results. Research indicates that girls' language and fine motor skills mature some six years earlier than do boys' – and boys' spatial and targeting memory mature four years earlier than do girls' (Hanlon, Thatcher, and Cline; 1999).

I reiterate that one of the most notable brain differences between the genders is the fact that males and females often use different parts of the brain for different tasks. I have just discussed how Kimura found that females' *left hemisphere* language abilities are more concentrated than males', whose language abilities were more distributed. Just as males and females draw from different parts of the brain for language, they do as well for other needs. For spatial tasks such as navigating, females call on the cerebral cortex, which compels them to utilize such sensory cues as storefront locations, a colorful tree, or even the aroma of a bakery. Sax (2005) claims that males conversely are more prone to give directions in absolutes: "Three miles south, turn left onto Route 27, seventh house

on the right." I raise these issues to illustrate that males and females differ in brain responses to different stimuli. Although the above example does not relate specifically to the verbal issue of Romance language acquisition, perhaps the following case does. Emotion, one of the traditional vehicles for self-expression in the humanities classroom, is stored, recalled, and sent forth for synthesis and expression either verbally or in writing from different brain sources in boys and girls. When a Romance language teacher asks her students to write a paper on or discuss with a classmate about an emotional experience (whether personal or not), girls, according to several studies (Kilgore, Oki, and Yurgelun-Todd, 2001; Schneider, Habel, and Associates, 2000), can more easily access the information because it is stored in the very active and responsive cerebral cortex. In contrast, boys' data is stuck at the bottom of the limbic system in the amygdala, a primitive area of the brain with weak connections to the verbal centers that has undergone little evolution for the million and a half years that Homo sapiens have existed (Halpern, 2000; Sax, 2005). Eventually these connections will strengthen and the young men will be able to discuss the depths of their sadness and the heights of their delights. But one can see how this natural brain-based variation can place boys at a disadvantage in the secondary school classroom. For adolescent boys it may not be simply a case of avoiding a discussion about their emotions (as many believe), but a matter of being less capable. Since Standard 1.1 (ACTFL et al.; 1999) requires that students among other things "...express feelings and emotions,..." (p. 9), whereas girls may find free flowing access to the reservoir of emotion, many boys find that source blocked. Access to the emotional memories is crucial if the student is to succeed in this assignment on an emotional experience in any language. Naturally, where the student struggles to meet the

conditions of an assignment, his self-perceptions as a competent communicator in the language will suffer.

If we accept the premise then of a natural female verbal advantage evolving from the beginning of history, it is not difficult to leap forward into the contemporary coed Romance language classroom and see boys at a disadvantage. Girls, with brains wired to be more social, more willing and able to express their feelings, and armed with a superior arsenal of verbal tools, feel more at home in an environment like the foreign language classroom that plays to their strengths. Boys present a stark contrast: their preference for independence is devalued, as dependence on partners with whom to interact is required to hone the verbal skill. Accessing the difficult-to-reach reservoir of emotions that are so often the subject of composition and conversation often results in a strained product. Inferior vocabulary banks and weaker fluency adversely affect language output. So much of what negatively impacts boys' self-perceptions in the Romance language classroom is indeed cognitively driven.

Pedagogy

We can see where brain research and knowledge of boys' and girls' particular strengths can be utilized to the teacher's advantage in the classroom environment. That boys have traditionally done well in the domains of math and science, and girls in the fields of English and foreign languages seems to follow in no small part from their natural gifts: girls as more verbal creatures who thrive in interactive settings, and boys as more analytical beings who embrace the solitude of problem-solving. Sax (2005) suggests that in addition to these innate differences (or perhaps as a result of them),

pedagogy has developed to the point where certain disciplines have taken on characteristics that appeal to the *feminine* brain or *masculine* brain. A physics class, with its heavy emphasis on math (a quantitative skill), movement ({as per Law, Pellegrino, & Hunt; 1993} *also* a male skill) and little if any need for cooperative learning strategies that appeal more to girls (Bray, Gardner, & Parsons, 1997; Lightfoot, 1998), is a very nice fit for the typical male brain. A poetry unit in a French class then, certainly very verbal in nature to begin with since it entails writing, may appeal to the female brain's superior linguistic proficiency. Moreover, we know that poetry is more than just writing – it tends to be a result of deep reflection, a romantic expression of how one feels, and, as previously put forth the adolescent male often doesn't know how he feels or why he feels it. In this case a typical male student might lack the verbal skills to write a good poem, since poetry tends to require mastery of secondary and tertiary meanings of common words (e.g. "become" as in the context of "That dress *becomes* you."). In addition and as mentioned above, he may be loath to reflect deeply on a topic that he has trouble accessing on an emotional level, having failed to contemplate it adequately in the past. Thus, his effort is thwarted by mediocre verbal skills coupled with the difficulty he has tapping into his emotional reservoir and after a handful of less than satisfying experiences, he is ready to surrender this discipline to the female domain.

Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne (1985) found that cooperative learning techniques have been of substantial benefit to girls, in contrast to the competitive modes of instruction that have favored boys. In the cooperative learning environment students are placed in groups (often randomly) and work together to answer questions, solve problems, and propose solutions. From what we know of girls discussed above, an

instructional set-up that values verbal interaction, cooperation, and collaboration, and whose hierarchy is vague, unclear, or non-existent is much more in line with girls' strengths. Bolman and Deal (1997) cite Helgesen's (1995) argument that female corporate leaders, when asked to describe where they put themselves in the company hierarchy, placed themselves in the center of their organizations, amid their fellow employees, where they could best be of use to the company by maintaining contact, building relationships, spreading knowledge and distributing leadership. The collaborative stamp of this type of leadership is in direct contrast to the male version which is characterized by the traditional top down design that tends to be less open to collaborative and shared decision-making . In the cooperative learning setting, as in any group setting, boys tend to pay heed to the hierarchy (Gurian, 2001), which may manifest itself in the assignment of tasks followed by an attempt to dissolve (subconsciously or not) the joint work by trying to work independently. As is often the case, teachers may interpret this development as uncooperative in both the traditional and specific sense, when in fact boys may simply be making a decision in their best interests as learners. As Pollock (1998) suggests, a more prudent strategy is to allow boys to follow their nature instead of attempting to breed the behavior out of them. One way to achieve this is by giving them more choices in the classroom; instead of requiring that all kids take part in the cooperative activity, allow one "group" to work independently and individually; in fact, not to be a group at all. This consideration may pay heed to Dickman's (1993) call for less gender stereotyping in the classroom – both in our beliefs about boys' and girls' capabilities, and how we craft our pedagogy. This said, boys and girls should nonetheless work to improve the weaker parts of their student repertoires so they become well-

rounded functional adults. There is no doubt that the collaborative techniques a young man learns through trial and error in the secondary classroom will serve him as an adult. But perhaps his capacity to learn the classroom content should, at times, take priority.

Foreign Language Pedagogy

Toward the end of the 19th century, foreign language pedagogy in the United States had undergone little change (Brown,1987). Virtually all teachers adhered to the Grammar/Translation Method (also known as the Classical Method), which entailed close study of grammar rules, memorization of copious often random and unconnected vocabulary, translation of texts, and completion of written exercises. Foreign language instruction in the United States revolved solely around the teaching of Latin and Greek, as it was believed that mastery of these languages was an essential component in erudition. In a certain sense, the Grammar/Translation method was befitting, since Latin, as a dead language, made no pretense to a need for listening and speaking, and the Greek that was the focus of study was classical and quite different from the vernacular. However, when French was introduced into American schools, its status as a current, living, and evolving language with a very active audio-lingual aspect to it did little to change pedagogical methods. After all and as before, foreign language was viewed simply as a vehicle to understanding and appreciating written texts – the classics, as in Homer, Vergil, Rousseau, and Voltaire. Knowledge of foreign language was not deemed a necessary interpersonal communicative skill, rather it was seen as a way to attain scholarship.

Nevertheless, at the turn of the century, different methods came to light. Gouin's method (inspired by both his spectacular failures learning German for a year in Germany and his realization upon his return to France that his toddler nephew had succeeded far better than he in learning a language) was based on a model of learning a series of connected sentences which conveyed a useful cause-effect relationship to the student (Thanasoulas, 2000). Shortly thereafter came the Direct Method whose principal tenet was that second language learning (L2) should mirror first language learning (L1), and as such should include characteristics that are reflective of this first experience with the process: 1) exclusive use of the target language in instruction, 2) grammar taught inductively, 3) emphasis on everyday vocabulary, and 4) use of images or objects to convey common vocabulary words (Thanasoulas, 2000). This method had trouble catching on in public schools due to such issues as budgetary constraints, larger classes, and the lack of teachers with the requisite mastery of the language, yet would resurface some thirty years later (Brown, 1987). In the 1930's, while many language curricula returned to the Grammar/Translation method, the Reading Method emerged, where as the name denotes, the reading skill gained prominence and was given long shrift.

In 1957, the Soviet Union stunned the American public by launching Sputnik, the first-ever satellite. American confidence in its educational system and its ability to outpace the world in math and science was shaken to the core; consequently, the following year, Congress enacted the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) which provided aid for training Americans not only in math and science but foreign languages as well (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). In fact many felt that since World War II when the need for military field personnel with L2 skills first became evident, knowledge

of foreign language should serve a wider purpose than solely that of attaining scholarship. The ability to understand and effectively communicate in a foreign language as a social advantage but also as a national security tool gained value. As a result, the Audio-lingual Method (ALM) was developed. ALM was based largely on the Army Language School methods, a system that relied heavily on repetitive oral practice (Griffiths and Parr, 2001). With the influx of money from the passage of the NDEA, and with the rise to prominence of methods like ALM that required repeated oral practice, many schools chose to build foreign language laboratories. Here, American students practiced the hallmarks of ALM: stimulus response, emphasis on pattern recognition, repetition, with little focus on new vocabulary or real meaning. Through the 1960's and 1970's, the ALM began adding grammar explanations, focusing on meaningful language use, and paying heed to the reading and writing skills as well, but its reputation as a dehumanizing approach with the learner as a passive pavlovian participant with little to offer in his or her own learning began to lose popularity. Perhaps related to the idealism of the 1960's, the Communicative Approach and the Proficiency Model began to take hold. With so many more people traveling to and fro, it became clear that the need to communicate using each of the four language skills should be tended to (Kramsch, 1986). This stage in foreign language instruction did share some key components of earlier methods: a significant use of the target language in class, substantial work on the listening and speaking skills, much oral instruction and explanation, grammar taught inductively, and emphasis on correct pronunciation. The general belief that acquisition of a second language (L2) should mirror the acquisition of the native language (L1), first seen above as an aspect of the Direct Method, was retained as part of the proficiency approach. But

what have we found about the first language learning experiences for boys and girls? As noted above, they have generally gone better for girls than for boys, as girls assimilate more vocabulary and more grammar knowledge more quickly, begin speaking before boys, and do so in longer, more sophisticated utterances. I reiterate Catalán's (2003) findings that girls use more vocabulary acquisition strategies than boys in the foreign language classroom. Sparks, Artzer, et al (1998) found that the acquisition of a second language (L2) bears many of the same characteristics as the process for the mother tongue (L1), and that students of L2 repeat many of the L1 strategies to assist them in the learning process. Thus, it would seem the Direct Method, with its aversion to rules and its emphasis on listening/speaking and reading/writing, is more of a natural fit for females. The Grammar/Translation method, on the other hand, given that it practically eliminates the verbal and listening skills and presents grammar in a more deductive, logical fashion, may appeal more naturally to boys in much the same way that analogies discussed on page 27 do. Furthermore, since this method sees foreign language learning less as a communicative tool than as a practical way to access other knowledge or scholarship (as in the classics), it may provide further appeal to boys' more utilitarian view of education in general (Lawrie and Brown, 1992) and foreign language acquisition in particular (Wilson, Stocking, & Goldstein, 1994; Carr & Pauwels, 2006).

I am by no means espousing separate teaching philosophies here; that we should employ one method with boys and another with girls. As Spolsky (1998) says, "Any theory of second language learning that leads to a single method is wrong" (p.1). I merely suggest that the development of foreign language pedagogy seems to have followed a logical sequence that plays to females' general strengths – language is after all a verbal

discipline. Strict adherence solely to old modes of instruction like the Grammar/Translation Method is not the approach we should consider if we are to help boys toward their potential. Nevertheless, a mix of approaches recognizes a mix of levels of readiness, interest, and learning styles (Tomlinson, 2001), and if a part of one method can benefit a portion of the class, it should be woven into the pedagogy. If boys do indeed share certain characteristics as learners of foreign languages in addition to the aforementioned brain differences, it would be easier to tend to their collective and individual needs in the single-sex classroom (Warrington & Younger, 2001).

James Asher (1977) created a technique that might help to underline this point. The Total Physical Response method (TPR) was a precursor of the Natural Approach, which held that language *production* ought not to be rushed; indeed, as infants and toddlers we listened to hundreds of thousands of words of language before we put forth our first utterance. TPR then is a technique that uses a series of commands to teach recognition of language long before language production is required. In a typical TPR class, students are asked to "stand up, sit down, go to the board, erase it, now write on it, hand the chalk to Johnny." After hearing and obeying these directives numerous times, the student gains an easy familiarity with the language used, and is soon ready to use it himself. Asher devised this approach for two chief reasons: first, he wanted a right-brain (spatial) approach to the left-brain (verbal) skill of language comprehension and production, and by having students get out of their chairs and *experience* the learning, he felt it appealed to the right-brained person, the more spatially inclined. Pollack (1998) suggests that "...whereas many girls may prefer to learn by watching or listening, boys generally prefer to learn by doing, by engaging in some action-oriented task" (p. 247).

Secondly, and for reasons that undoubtedly grew out of his experience as a psychologist, Asher understood that the very significant anxiety of having to produce orally before one is ready (and in front of one's peers) is effectively removed with TPR, thereby allowing the learner a more relaxed environment in which to experiment and learn. We can see how this type of approach might well serve boys, who may prefer to get some kinetic experience under their belts before they risk venturing forth verbally with the language. First devised in the sixties, TPR is recognized as an extremely useful technique for foreign language intake, i.e. initial comprehension (Krashen, 1981), as well as for replication of the native language learning process (Richards & Rogers, 1986). Several mainstream foreign language textbook publishers, e.g. Scott, Foresman and Company (Reynolds, Rodriguez, & Schonfeld, 1989) and D.C. Heath and Company (Valette and Valette, 1994) provide suggested TPR lessons that help teachers integrate the procedure into their classes.

Asher's attempt to reach the right-brained learner is admirable because it is a distinct recognition of various learning styles in any given classroom, as well as an acknowledgement that certain disciplines play to right-brain or left-brain strengths. Physics teachers, computer science teachers, poetry, and French teachers take note: we should all occasionally look at our pedagogy in these disciplines from the brain's perspective.

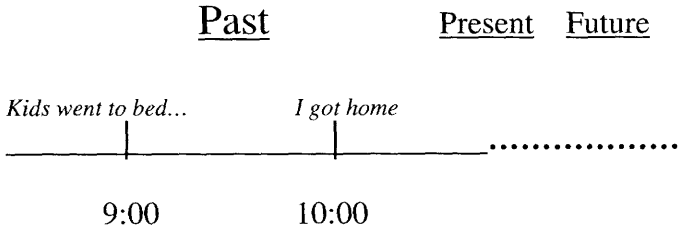
Marcel Danesi, author of Second Language Teaching: A View from the Right Side of the Brain (2003), asserts that high levels of language acquisition occur when the learner is provided with experiential learning (R-mode or right brain) followed by formal practice of the new material (L-mode or left brain). He states, "New notions and

structures are learned more efficiently when the learner's brain is allowed to process it in terms of an R-mode (experiential) to an L-mode (analytical) 'flow'" (p. 50). Danesi's bimodality then acknowledges that although the brain's left hemisphere is the primary biological seat of the language functions, the right hemisphere is intricately involved in complementing the whole of language learning as well. When we consider Asher's TPR approach and its similarity to the toddler's learning process, we see how important experiential input is in language acquisition and how crucial varying our pedagogy is to completing the language acquisition process. Danesi's theory then is that language is more than simply words and sounds; it involves "...neural processes that [are] distributed throughout the brain" (p. 5, Mollica; 2008), and is more effectively taught and learned when the right hemisphere is involved in the interpretive side of the process. My personal experience lends truth to this theory: I recall having initially learned the words "vide" (empty) and "la poubelle" (wastebasket) in the classroom, but only when my junior year abroad host mother, Madame Peru instructed, "Cort, vide la poubelle s'il te plaît" and I carried out the task did I realize that "vide" the adjective was so similar to "vider" the verb. This is what Krashen's "comprehensible input" (1981) refers to; that input ought to be presented in context so that it can activate the synthesis of the right hemisphere.

In the foreign language classroom for example, grammar is too often presented and explained by the teacher as an inevitable nuisance, a dry, boring necessity that takes us away from the more amusing business of interacting with each other about ourselves (whether on a deep or superficial level). Yet grammar is a phenomenon that follows, for the most part, a logic that can appeal to boys' learning styles. For example, the Past Perfect tense in Romance languages is used to distinguish between two events in the past,

one of which occurred before the other, e.g. *When I got home last night (10:00), my children had already gone to bed (9:00).* Given that these two actions are not simultaneous, we show which one took place first by using *had* + *past participle*. I have found it helpful to teach this concept not only verbally, but spatially as well:

Table 2: Past Perfect Tense



Whereas a verbal explanation (accompanied by a hand-out of a similar verbal explanation) might not adequately convey the logic of this grammar concept to the spatially inclined, this visual depiction could potentially do so better. Tailoring our pedagogy to appeal to different learning styles, first suggested by Howard Gardner in his assertions about multiple intelligences (1983) and currently referred to as *differentiated instruction*, is a relevant, contemporary concept recognized as a means to reach a wide assortment of learners (Tomlinson, 2001). For now, I wish only to suggest that we attempt to make use of current brain research to inform our approach to teaching boys and girls.

Due in part to the historical brain-based differences, women have come to dominate the ranks of Romance language teachers. Using the Massachusetts chapter of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) 2006 membership as a measurement, one finds that a stunning 85 % of all member French

teachers, 77 % of all member Spanish teachers, and 86 % of all member Italian teachers are female. Furthermore, it appears likely that a good percentage of the few male teachers in these languages, judging by their names, are native speakers who did not necessarily have to undergo rigorous L2 training. This gender disparity is worthy of note because teachers come to their classrooms not only with their personal backgrounds and biases that influence how they teach, but brain make-ups as well. It stands to reason that a female Romance language teacher may employ a pedagogy that is heavily tilted toward the "female" wired brain, since that is likely the style with which she is most familiar (with the same obviously holding true for male teachers in the advanced math and science classes). In the earlier example of the writing exercise on an emotional experience, a female teacher might do well to challenge herself to differentiate her instruction to tend to the more spatially inclined by offering the students a choice: a piece on an emotional experience (as originally discussed above), or on an emotionally charged topic such as capital punishment, or immigration. The logic required to defend one side of such a debate topic, now from a disinterested perspective, would play better to the male student's strengths and provide a better connection to his own learning.

Dee (2006) found that teacher gender really does matter to boys and girls, concluding that boys and girls learn more from same-sex teachers, maintain a better connection to the discipline, and are more likely to continue to pursue the course in college and even professionally. The study found that in English, Science, and Social Studies, a female teacher raised girls' test scores by 4% of a standard deviation, and lowered boys' scores by a similar amount, producing a significant differential of almost 8%. Dee believes that were there more male English teachers at the middle school level,

the reading gap would be reduced by one third by the end of the eighth grade. The problem, as stated in this study, is that the results seem to lean toward a zero sum game, that is, where there is improvement for one gender, there is almost an equal measure of decline for the other. Although not an ideal situation for improving the condition of both genders, it does make a statement about the merits of single-sex education, since teachers in all-boys schools tend to be males who motivate boys better at no expense to girls. More discussion on this will follow in the single-sex versus coeducation section later in this chapter.

Johnson (1973) conducted an intriguing study in which school-aged boys and girls from the United States, England, Canada, and Nigeria were tested in several reading areas. Girls outpaced boys in the U.S. and Canada, while boys outperformed girls in Nigeria and England, both countries which interestingly enough, have significant numbers of male primary reading teachers. I raise the topic now however because much of this issue can be looked at from the cognitive side...the teacher's cognitive side that is. A class that is taught by a woman may have the stamp of female cognitive characteristics on every aspect of the course, from the readings, to the assignments, to the pedagogy, to the assessments, because that is part of her essence – she is most likely a female-brain being. When a young man in her class is under performing, she may be more inclined to try to softly cajole him to recognize the importance of school than to deliver the hard message in a more direct and challenging manner. Instead of attempting to reduce his stress by speaking in calming, soothing tones, Wood and Shors (1998) might advise a slightly more confrontational approach as a means to better motivate him. Males are more receptive to moderate levels of stress as a means of motivation, whereas girls do not

thrive under stressful conditions, reacting better to the soft approach alluded to above. This, as Sax (2005) states, may explain why boys tend to do better than what we might expect vs. girls on most standardized tests, where the sheer gravity and high stakes as well as the time limit provide girls with sufficient stress to have a negative impact.

How we teach our students is in many ways a reflection of how we have learned. How we have learned may also be a reflection of how the generations of teachers before us have taught. Foreign language teaching and learning, like pedagogy in general, are directly connected to our cognition. If there are brain-based differences between females and males, it stands to reason that our pedagogy should be equally varied in order to provide an optimal learning environment and to permit both genders to develop the requisite skills to offset any such differences and achieve at as similarly high levels as their counterparts. Until we provide foreign language pedagogy that evens the playing field for boys, their self-perceptions as learners in this field are likely to suffer.

Socio-Cultural Ramifications

Having first discussed nature's influence on boys and their language production, followed by pedagogy's contribution to how boys see themselves as Romance language learners, we now turn to the nurture side: what are the socio-cultural issues at work that affect their self-perceptions?

As mentioned earlier, certain academic disciplines have come to be identified as male or female "domains" by virtue of a historical preponderance of one gender and/or superior achievement of that gender when compared to the other. Various authors refer to this phenomenon (Salomone, 2003; Barton, 2002), generally in the context of how

effective single-sex education is as a mitigating factor, an issue that I will address later in this chapter. Indeed and as explained earlier, brain differences in boys and girls play a role in such polarization of the curriculum by gender, explaining in part why girls with their verbal capacities might naturally fare better than boys in a literature class, or why boys with their spatial/quantitative skills might outperform girls in a physics class. However, it is also easy to understand why boys and girls might begin to embrace these stereotypes, as they offer confirmation that these young men and women are growing up, and that they are developing according to nature's "grand plan." Salomone's (2003) "cultural lore" (p. 103) asserts that socio-cultural issues compel boys and girls to gravitate toward the stereotype, to help fulfill the prophecy that they will be better at the traditional courses than the non-traditional. If a course is considered part of the male domain, like physics, why would the typical adolescent female feel the desire to take it? With mostly boys in a class taught most likely by a male teacher, she concludes she would feel more comfortable in the female-friendly biology class (an acceptable female science since much of it entails the reproductive process). In a similar fashion, the Romance language class has long been considered a feminine domain (Ormerod, 1975; Clark, 1995), and one to which boys have traditionally assigned less importance than they have the typical male domain disciplines such as advanced maths, sciences, and even the "feminine" subject of English (since reading and writing skills in one's own language are central to success). Foreign language, on the other hand, bears a double stigma: it is a perceived "feminine" subject (Clark, 1995), and it is secondary in importance from a practical perspective in that there truly are limited career opportunities for the linguist.

Indeed, striving to excel in foreign language is to risk appearing to engage in feminine behavior, which could lead to serious social consequences for adolescent boys.

Sadker and Sadker (1995) found that when boys were asked to imagine what it would be like to be a member of the opposite sex, only 5% of them found something positive to say (versus 46% of the girls)! Boys' disdain for all things feminine certainly can negatively affect their performance in a discipline such as Romance languages, which is generally regarded as feminine. Hoff-Sommers (2000) found that many boys are hesitant to express opinions in class for fear of appearing feminine, for going against a prevalent anti-intellectual code of behavior that Coleman (1961) first identified as an adolescent sub-culture that is scornful of academic achievement, while valuing athletic achievement and physical attractiveness above all else. If boys are taciturn in expressing opinions in their *own* language, it is easy to understand the complexities involved when we discuss Standard 1.1 (ACTFL et al., 1999) which requires mastery of this skill in a *foreign* language.

Are boys' self-perceptions as learners of Romance languages affected by these conditions? Indeed, with a cognitive disadvantage worked in, with adolescent culture conveying the message that achievement is somehow akin to feminine behavior, and with few practical career opportunities beyond academia, boys are subject to pressure, direct and subtle, to under-perform in the Romance language classroom.

Williams, Burden, and Lanvers' (2002) study in Great Britain found an overall higher level of motivation to learn foreign language among girls than boys, and revealed that boys were remarkably more motivated to learn German than French (two of the most common foreign languages taught in the United Kingdom). Reasons given by both boys

and girls included the widely held perception that French was a feminine language that German was more masculine, and that it was not considered "cool" for boys to work hard at French. Davies (2004) posits further that in her study of British students, boys under-perform compared to girls most severely in foreign language, and cites a study by Jones and Jones (2001) which shows that boys indicated that considerable use of the target language in class by teachers and fellow students was a de-motivating factor, as was their perception that foreign language "lacks relevance and usefulness" (p. 53). Given that current foreign language pedagogy emphasizes the National Standards and their focus on overall foreign language proficiency (i.e. using the language for listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and as such encourages substantial use of the target language in class, it would seem that boys' performance is adversely affected by present teaching methods, and that an occasional return to the grammar/translation mode of instruction, which uses little oral practice in the target language, would serve some boys' needs. The second point, that of practical application of foreign language in the real world, is interesting in that it comes from English boys who reside on a continent dense with linguistic diversity, where one can board a train and hear a plethora of different languages over the course of even a modest trip. Knowledge of foreign language in England has much to offer in the way of relevance and usefulness when compared to the United States, a country significantly more linguistically isolated than England. It could be that the boys in this study see irrelevance in foreign language from a career perspective, i.e. that one's professional aspirations are little enhanced by knowledge of a foreign language, whereas girls see this knowledge as improving their ability to interact and interrelate with more people. Perhaps this is more of Salomone's (2003) "cultural lore"

(p. 103), more of nature's brain-based gender differences reinforcing socio-cultural beliefs. In other words, if girls are good at it, it must be women's work and therefore undesirable and irrelevant. Clark and Trafford's (1996) study in Great Britain and Kobayashi's (2002) in Japan found similarly that boys assign less importance to learning a foreign language than do girls.

In yet another British study, Warrington, Younger, and Williams (2000) found that it was more permissible for girls to care about their grades and work hard yet remain tied to the "cool" school clique, whereas boys were under more pressure to pay heed to a stricter male image of "cool" which tended to ridicule those boys who worked hard.

In a Canadian study investigating gender differences in motivation to learn French, Kissau (2006) found that socio-cultural issues are at the root of the motivational gender discrepancy, determining that boys' perceptions about what is appropriate male behavior in Western societies wield considerable clout in how hard they strive to achieve. If the perception exists that knowledge of a foreign language is something that females are good at, then boys may begin to shy away. Moreover, if the foreign language in questions bears a feminine image to it, as Romance languages seem to do, boys might begin to look elsewhere to fulfill their language requirement, or simply resign themselves to mediocrity by not putting forth sufficient effort. Lefkowitz and Hedgcock (2006) also found motivational differences based on gender in Spanish pronunciation, asserting that attaining the "pedagogical standard is more important for female learners than for male students" (p. 21). Their study revealed that boys are far more likely to find value in "subversive prestige" (p. 30), that is, that "...being viewed as capable of 'good' pronunciation while deliberately subverting desired speech norms was more appealing

than adhering to the pedagogical standard" (p. 30). Although the researchers did not delve further into the socio-cultural origins of such deliberate subversion, it is entirely plausible that boys associate good pronunciation and general achievement in Romance language as feminine behavior, worthy only of frivolous attention.

As mentioned in Chapter One, not all foreign languages are equal in boys' eyes. Hence, when we look at the levels of participation of college-bound seniors on the 2006 SAT Subject Tests in various foreign languages, we gain an interesting insight into how boys feel about Romance languages in particular:

Table 3: Number of Male/Female Foreign Language SAT Subject Test-Takers 2006

Language	# of Test Takers	Male/Female %
French	247,061	38/62
Italian	27,313	44/56
Spanish	852,047	45/55
Latin	87,001	47/53
German	6,494	55/45

Boys represent a significant minority of those tested on the Romance language tests (French, Spanish, and Italian) for the 2006 year, whereas there is more parity in the number of Latin test takers and even a significant imbalance of ten points in the number of male versus female German students. The year 2006 was by no means an anomaly, as these percentages have remained relatively consistent over the last eight years at least.

What variables are at work then that draw such a high percentage of boys away from Romance languages toward other languages? What have German and Latin got that French, Italian, and Spanish haven't? Are boys attracted to the study of German as a means to remain connected to their heritage? Unlikely, since there are certainly as many young men of French, Italian, and Spanish/Hispanic backgrounds who are equally as

proud of their heritage as there are of German. Based on what has been discussed above, a far more likely scenario is that boys consider the study of Romance language to be less in line with their views on what is an appropriate course of study for males.

Prior to the passage of Title IX in 1975, what were considered appropriate courses of study for boys and girls were much more clearly defined; for example, girls were not permitted to take shop class, and boys manifested little desire to take home economics. Much has changed since then to widen course options for both genders, but as the French like to say, *Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chôse* (the more things change, the more they remain the same). Although boys do occasionally participate on the field hockey team, and girls are members of the chess club, students continue nevertheless to be affected by socio-cultural stereotypes (albeit nowadays in more subtle ways), which continue to affect how we define appropriate gender-based behavior.

Consider an adolescent male's thought process when deciding whether to study a Romance versus a non-Romance language, say French or German at his local high school. When one contemplates the French culture vis-à-vis the German culture, vastly different images emerge. Contemporary French culture, for example, is characterized in boys' minds by such things as haute coûture (high fashion), perfume, and haute cuisine (gourmet cooking) (Pritchard, 1987), all of which are industries that appeal to typically feminine interests in Western culture. Rosenthal (1999), in his discussion of Americans' perceptions of the French, has this to say: "For France, as a country and a culture, the characterization is overwhelmingly feminine, so much so that even the masculinity of the French men is open to question by more than a few Americans. There is evidence of a popular notion in the United States that France has qualities and faults that are

'characteristic' of the female gender and that compromise the virility of the men" (p. 897).

The Frenchman's tendency toward the over-refined or effete, no more clearly manifest than at the table (Rosenthal, 1999), runs counter to the image of the red-blooded American male who may be less discriminating in his choice of sauces for the main course but will certainly come back for seconds. It is so common today to see students carrying water bottles around school and into classes, yet what adolescent boy would carry a bottle of *Perrier*? Ferstein's (1982) claim that *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* is a clear allusion to the concept that American culture views the French effeteness as directly contradictory to American modes of masculinity. Watson's (1995) follow-up claim that "Real men don't speak French" (p. 12) is a direct reference to most Americans' image of the language as feminine. The French language, as discussed earlier, has a beautifully lyrical sound and soft cadence, resulting in part from an abundance of vowel sounds and fewer consonants; many believe this lends it a feminine trait (Dörnyei and Clément, 2001). Rosenthal (1999) summarizes his points by asserting, "The figures are provocative and may suggest that American males find it difficult to make a psychic connection with French language and culture" (p. 906).

Conversely, according to boys' perceptions, contemporary German culture is distinguished by high performance sports cars, wars, and industry (Pritchard, 1987), all typically interesting to males young and not so young. German efficiency, present everywhere from its automotive engineering to the punctuality of its rail system, is held in high regard by boys. When we think of German food, we see a much heartier and less sophisticated diet than the French: bratwurst and sauerkraut, washed down with a stein of

beer. Our image of typical Germans tend to be masculine: tall, strong, Nordic types, including the barmaid who must deliver enormous glasses of beer to her clientele. The German language has a hard guttural rhythm to it, due in part to consonant clusters and intensity, which would be difficult indeed to characterize as feminine either in sound or cadence. Insofar as French culture has a feminine mystique, Germany's is all masculine. To boys and to Americans in general, French is the culture of love, German the culture of strength.

In her study of college students of French, German, and Spanish, Ludwig (1983) found not only that French was perceived as a feminine language, but that students who studied French tended to major in the Arts and Letters, (more feminine fields), whereas students who studied German felt that it was masculine, and typically majored in the hard sciences, math, or business, disciplines which lead to male-dominated fields. She found further that females preferred to enroll in French by a 2:1 ratio, Spanish by a 3:2 ratio, yet were even (1:1) with regard to German. As regards the aural attractiveness of these languages, males and females in similar numbers described French as sounding "neat," while females were twice as likely as males to define Spanish as such, and males three times more prone to use that descriptor for German. Finally, participants were asked to choose five adjectives from a list of eleven to describe each language, and did so with remarkable consistency between the genders: both males and females described these languages as follows, from most frequent to fifth most frequent:

French - romantic, attractive, useful, complex, and intellectual
German - useful, complex, intellectual, strong, and precise
Spanish - useful, attractive, logical, clear, complex (boys)/romantic (girls).

By contemplating these descriptors for these three languages, two of which are Romance (French and Spanish), and the third of which is Germanic (German), we see a continuation of the images set forth earlier: French as a sophisticated, acoustically pleasing, and seductive language of romance, a fair reflection of its culture; German, a pragmatic language choice, challenging, masculine, and efficient, much like German culture; Spanish, useful given it is so widely spoken, pleasing to the ear, and romantic as well, also in the image of its mother country, Spain.

Pritchard (1987) also found that German carried a more masculine image than French, adding that the language with its hard consonants "conveys a gravitas to which many males aspire" (p. 66). Although this study underlined that young people view German as harsher, less aesthetic, and more masculine than French, it did find that the male subjects in the study acknowledged German was more difficult than either French or Spanish, and that as males progressed through the German sequence (i.e. from beginner to advanced), more and more males dropped out. This would imply that a language's image and its perceived identification to individual males has limited influence. In other words, simply identifying with the culture for whatever reason, heritage or image, is unlikely to guarantee long-term success. Even those boys who felt German was more in line with their values tended to eventually fall behind the girls.

Having discussed at length French and German as sample Romance and non-Romance languages, I hope I have made a persuasive argument that languages carry stereotypes and images that influence how we feel about them, their native speakers, and their cultures. These perceptions, whether true or false, fair or unfair, contribute to boys'

perceptions of their appropriateness as courses of study and how worthy they are of serious, sustained effort.

Stereotype Threat

What happens when entirely capable boys are placed in a situation where the general perception is that they are weaker than the girls? Several studies (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) indicate that in general boys overestimate their abilities while girls tend to underestimate theirs. Does this tool of self-insulation protect their esteem and self-perceptions as learners of Romance languages? Perhaps not. The false bravado may be a defense mechanism that boys employ to deceive others, but to thine own selves they are true: boys are aware of the perception of their own weaknesses in Romance languages and are affected by it. In their work on the black/white achievement gap, Steele and Aronson (1995) discuss a phenomenon called "stereotype threat," which posits that when traditional underachievers are placed in an evaluative situation, such as a test or simply being called upon in class, their awareness of the stereotype surrounding them represents additional stress and risk which tends to have a detrimental effect on their performance. When subjects in their study were told that the work was non-evaluative, the black students' performance rose dramatically, while the white students' remained constant. They conclude that many blacks feel that they must perform at unreasonably high levels in order to dispel stereotypes, and that any less than perfect performance adds to the unjust general bias. Naturally, this level of pressure seriously hampers student performance.

According to Aronson and Good (2002), adolescents are particularly prone to stereotype threat as they begin to develop their meta-cognitive and socio-cognitive abilities, defining themselves based on racial, gender, class, and social criteria. When they become aware of stereotypes that impugn their intellectual abilities based on these criteria, it has the expected negative effect. The study was not limited solely to the black/white achievement gap, but addressed as well other minority groups and, interestingly enough, females in traditional male domains. There was no mention of the inverse issue of boys in traditionally female domains, but Aronson's and Good's findings could be á propos nonetheless. If boys believe that Romance languages are a female's domain, where girls benefit from a brain-based advantage and are free of the socio-cultural impediments that hinder boys, it seems entirely plausible that the boys could also fall prey to stereotype threat and allow the prophecy of male underachievement in Romance language to be fulfilled. Aronson (2004) bears good news however: underachievement resulting from stereotype threat can be offset by positive student self-perceptions. He indicates that "Stereotype threat is partly situational; it varies in intensity as a function of social climate and of students' perceptions about their own goals and abilities"(p. 16). Stereotype threat then, if it exists among boys in the Romance language classroom, could be disarmed in the single-sex setting as the threat of comparison to and judgment from higher achievers (i.e. *girls*) is removed.

What other effect, if any, would the coeducational environment have on the socio-cultural conditions highlighted above? If boys do indeed feel that achievement in French, Italian, and Spanish is somehow akin to engaging in feminine behavior, to what degree does the presence of girls in the classroom contribute to this perception? To what extent

does it aggravate it? Does the presence of the opposite gender raise the stakes and amplify sensitivities for young people? Up until the recent relaxation of Title IX requirements, single-sex classes in public schools were permitted only in rare instances, one of which was sex education – a clear recognition that sensitive conditions require thoughtful, measured responses. Let's look at the issue of single-sex education and how it obtains to this question of boys and Romance languages.

Single-Sex Education

Few issues have been subject to such intense scrutiny, undergone such radical transformation, and made for such strange bedfellows as the issue of single-sex education. Originally seen by many as promoting male hegemony by denying females equal opportunities to learn, many now see it as the only way to allow young women and men to realize their potential. Initially seen by proponents as beneficial only to girls and minority boys, many now hail it as the answer to the "boy crisis." An issue that binds as allies the likes of Hillary Clinton and George W. Bush, yet pits feminist against feminist, single-sex education now transcends traditional political partisanship.

The advent of the woman's movement in the sixties brought to light inequities in our public schools that were harmful to young women. Schools were not providing educational opportunities to all; rather they were funneling boys and girls toward separate curricula and eventually, separate vocations. In effect, they were committed to extending the status quo, i.e. the perpetuation of male hegemony and the economic reliance of women upon men by severely limiting their professional potential (Tyack & Hansot, 1990). Schools were, according to Tyack and Hansot, reflective solely of the male

perspective, and prone to "...stress abstract thought instead of subjectivity and interrelatedness, competitiveness instead of cooperation, assertiveness instead of compassion. Male perspectives permeate the whole curriculum, which is not gender neutral but based on a male epistemology and abstract ethic of justice" (p. 283).

The feminist movement raised some uncomfortable questions for the traditionalists: Why couldn't our daughters take shop class or play more sports? Why is the guidance office counseling young women away from the rigorous math and science courses? Why is it that so many of the academic and co-curricular programs reinforce the archaic images of a woman's role in our society (e.g. support staff, motherhood, elementary teaching, librarians, etc.)? With the passage of Title IX in 1972, many believed the problem had been resolved. Given that separate could not be equal, we would now teach boys and girls together in all public schools and classrooms, and through integration we would achieve equality. However, Cohen and Roper (1972) found that simply bringing diverse groups together without a plan not only is unlikely to dispel stereotypes, but is actually more likely to reinforce them, results that were replicated by Riordan (1978). A Lockheed and Klein (1985) study found that unsupervised interaction between the sexes is "characterized by a lack of cooperation and (a) male dominance" (p. 199).

Much of the status quo then remained unchanged, with girls maintaining their second-class status as students in the American public school system (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). As James Coleman points out in his forward to Riordan's Girls and Boys in School: Together or Separate? (1990), the assumption that coeducation is the fairest, most effective way to teach our young may be ill conceived: "Yet it is often true that the

conventional wisdom is strong enough to inhibit research into the area in question. If there is a societal consensus that one institution is *right*, then even the researcher may act as a self-censoring agent, steering away from research that questions this rightness. Coeducation is such an institution" (p. ix).

Thus, research on the advantages of single-sex education has had to contend with the "conventional wisdom" that separate cannot be equal. Indeed, we initially learned through Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) that this was so, that governments and people cannot be trusted to insure that those who are separated be treated equally, and Brown v. the Board of Education (1954) acknowledged this as a given. With the passage of Title IX in 1972, legislation was in place that *required* equality in expenditures and program offerings for boys and girls in public schools. Despite Title IX's best intentions however, evidence has mounted that single-sex education does indeed have merits that lend credence to it as a superior method of educating females (Sadker & Sadker, 1994) and males (Sax, 2005; Fox-Genovese & Podles, 1995) of all races, backgrounds (Riordan, 1990), and economic strata (Hoff-Sommers, 2000). What follows are some of the more prevalent issues surrounding the single-sex versus coeducation debate.

Adult Modeling

A young person's self-esteem can only be enhanced by the presence of an influential adult role-model. Many young people are fortunate enough to look to their parents to provide guidance of a general nature. When it comes to the classroom however, what type of person is likely to motivate our children best, challenge them, nurture them, and help them reach their potential? What type of teacher will help improve

a young man's self-perceptions as a learner in the Romance language classroom? Earlier in this chapter I discuss Dee's findings (2006) that boys and girls tend to learn better from same-sex teachers. Riordan (1990) claims that young people look to adults and others with similar characteristics to their own (i.e. sex, race, culture, class) for cues on appropriate conduct. Dee (2004) asserts that students perform better with same-race teachers, and Ladson-Billings (1994) discusses the significance of students feeling a sense of sameness with their teachers and the consequential motivational advantages. While few would dispute that there are outstanding role-models of either gender in both the single-sex and coed settings, single-sex schools would appear to provide a more ideal environment for positive role modeling given that they are staffed by a higher percentage of same-sex teachers than coed schools (Finn, 1980).

It is perhaps not by coincidence that the academic advantage that girls enjoy over boys at the elementary level, where the vast majority of teachers is female, is reduced at the secondary level where there is a much stronger male presence. Tidball's (1980) study of 1116 women graduates randomly chosen from *Who's Who of American Women*, found a strikingly high correlation ($r = .96$) between the number of accomplished women and the number of female faculty at their colleges. Studies by Johnson (1973) and Klainin and Fensham (1986) appear to support the importance of same-sex role models: the first study indicated boys' reading scores in England and Nigeria well exceeded those of Canadian and American girls for second, fourth, and sixth grade students, and the second study, undertaken in Thailand, showed girls scoring significantly higher than boys in physical science knowledge and attitudes about the discipline. It is unusual that girls and boys would outperform each other in these disciplines that traditionally have been, as

discussed above, the domain of the other. Riordan (1990) cites the Klainin and Fensham (1986) study that proffers a plausible explanation in this case: in England and Nigeria, there are significant numbers of male elementary school and reading teachers; in Thailand, the majority of science teachers are female.

It is easy to see the relevance of the role model issue to boys and Romance language achievement. As indicated above, the vast majority of Romance language teachers at the secondary level are female, a situation which when grouped with the socio-cultural, cognitive, and pedagogical issues cited earlier, represent formidable obstacles to the adolescent male's achievement. In the single-sex setting, the young man is more likely to have the benefit of a male teacher to assuage the challenge. Dee's (2006) research, also discussed above, provides additional evidence of the importance of same-sex teachers across the curriculum; that boys would benefit in the Romance language classroom from the superior modeling that the single-sex environment would bring is by no means a stretch of the imagination.

Peer Modeling

Of course the other significant influence in the adolescent's academic and social life is that of the peer group. Later on in this chapter I shall discuss its more negative attributes under the heading of "Youth Culture." But what of the *positive* power of the peer group? When children can benefit from a positive peer role-model, either as a best friend or a fellow classroom student, parents, teachers, and adolescents can rejoice. Just as the friend helps to develop his peer's social self-identity, the classroom student leader provides cues on how to conduct oneself as a student. In the single-sex setting, students

can often benefit from same-sex teacher modeling (as mentioned above), complemented by peer modeling as well since the best students in each class are of the same gender. When the classroom role-model consistently supports the curricular goals of the course, it is more acceptable for others to follow his or her lead. Aronson (1999) discusses this substantial release of peer pressure when one member of the group engages in non-normative behavior, and is supported by another; "The presence of this fellow dissenter dramatically reduces the pressure to conform, ..." (p. 24), e.g. when a boy in a single-sex French class follows his male teacher's lead by striving to master the accent, the route is paved for others to follow, and the behavior is now more easily regarded as normative. It would seem that this alliance, fragile as it may seem at the onset, has a stronger chance of gaining momentum (and allies) with a same-sex teacher at the front of the classroom and with same-sex students who are less inclined to be distracted by non-academic, external forces (Lee & Bryk, 1986).

Covert Channeling

What else contributes to a dominance of one gender over another in a given discipline, leading to the perception that some classes are for girls and others for boys? It is a phenomenon called "covert channeling," which refers to the tendency to direct students of one perceived ability level toward a particular course or track of study without their knowledge or informed consent. As I mentioned earlier, this practice thrived in the pre-Title IX era, when students typically would train for a male or female vocation, and when preconceived notions and overt stereotypes existed about which sexes were inclined to which sorts of work. In discussing the insidiousness of covert channeling,

Rosenbaum (1980) asks "Is 'curriculum' merely the courses a student takes or is it a sorting mechanism which channels students, perhaps even without their awareness?" (p. 75). Carr (2002) asserts that boys are often discouraged from continuing foreign language study beyond the requirement, and Kissau (2007) agrees, claiming that there is a significant disparity in the amount boys and girls are encouraged to take French, which is a crucial factor in the dwindling numbers of boys' enrollments. It is important to point out that this study focused on encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers, and showed boys lagging behind girls in each subset of encouragement type. Riordan (1990) found that the single-sex environment was an effective neutralizer to covert channeling, claiming that there are far fewer restrictions to access the school curricula in single-sex schools, and that school practices which perpetuate cultural attitudes (such as boys being naturally better at math and science and girls in the humanities) were drastically reduced as well.

It would appear then that on the subject of this question, the single-sex environment would be a suitable place for a young man to flourish as a Romance language student for at least two reasons: 1) he is less likely to be subtly counseled out of the discipline for "covert" reasons because someone has to fill the rosters in the French, Spanish, and Italian courses in these all-boys schools, and 2) the aforementioned pre-conceived notions and overt stereotypes, in this case, that Romance language is a feminine endeavor, are substantially decreased in the single-sex environment.

Youth Culture

We know that not all social norm cues are transmitted by the adults in our schools. Youth culture bears an enormous influence on all aspects of adolescents' lives and lifestyles, including not only what disciplines are important, but what earnest effort in each of them implies. A study by James Coleman (1961), presented in his book The Adolescent Society, found that academic achievement occupied a low status in the lives of students, with most young people much more interested in material objects and "...the cruel jungle of rating and dating..." (p. 51) members of the opposite sex. In overwhelming numbers, boys wanted to be known for athletic prowess, and girls for their attractiveness, popularity, and/or leadership of some activity. Very few students felt a keen need to be remembered as "brilliant." Furthermore, more than any other variable in Coleman's study, going out for the football team was directly related to belonging to the most important cliques (i.e. enjoying extreme popularity), a finding which I believe underlined the irrelevance of academics in the lives of students some forty-seven years ago. What relevance do Coleman's findings hold today? Very much I would suggest, because in some ways little has changed since 1961. Girls and boys continue to dress provocatively, the only difference being the styles have changed. Students continue to rank each other by the car they drive, whom they date, and how athletic they are. Surely Title IX represented a major step forward for girls (and to a lesser degree boys), who could now freely and legally cross over into non-traditional disciplines and other school programs. But clearly this landmark 1972 legislation came at a cost: it undermined our ability to look at single-sex education in the public domain, since public school expenditures had to be evenly beneficial to both genders. It kept us from pursuing the

very viable options that the single-sex setting represented in putting intellectual pursuits atop the priority list. Coleman suggested that the single-sex environment may be part of the answer to counteracting this anti-intellectualism, a sentiment echoed by Streitmatter (1999), who claims that this adolescent society is empowered by the coeducational environment and its dating/rating game referred to above, the tendency of girls and boys to "dress to impress" the opposite sex, and the issue of sexual harassment. Lee and Bryk (1986) assert that single-sex students are more able to separate their social and academic concerns, and "...that some separation of students' academic and social environments removes the distractions that can interfere with the academic development of some students" (p. 394). Goodlad (1984) reports that the loss of influence of the family unit due to divorce, two working parents, and other contemporary issues has allowed a void that the peer group has moved in to fill – for better or for worse. It is easy to speculate that a student who receives less effective supervision might benefit from a peer group that places primary value on academics over socializing.

Goodlad (1984) also lists student preferences for courses based on likeability, importance, and difficulty (pp. 116-117); at the high school level, foreign language was ranked least likeable, least important, and third most difficult. I point this out to emphasize that boys' achievement in a non-traditional field like Romance languages would be adversely affected by the philistine philosophy that youth culture practices because it is doubly stigmatized: first as a difficult academic course, and secondly as a "feminine" discipline.

Locus of Control

"In that class, I don't know *what's* going on," a former Romance language student of mine, one who had worked hard to meet with success in my class, said recently. He first cited his weakness as a Spanish student compared to other students in the class, then his teacher, and finally how he had neglected to approach her prior to a recent test. I read in his comments a resignation and helplessness that were undercutting his self-perceptions as an effective, capable Spanish student. Although there were indeed steps he could have taken to ameliorate his situation, his impression was that improvement was beyond his control. "Locus of control" then is the term used here to measure the degree to which individuals feel they control circumstances leading to their personal academic and social outcomes. In other words, do students accept responsibility for their educational and social outcomes in school, seeing them as a consequence of their behavior, or do they attribute their performance to external forces such as fate and bad luck? When students feel a sense of control over their own successes and failures, they understandably feel empowered and invested in their own learning. Hulse (1997) found that single-sex school boys had "...a significantly higher sense of control over their performance than coed boys" (p. 9). Cairns (1990) agrees, asserting that "...single-sex schools may contribute to an increased sense of cognitive competence and a more inner-oriented locus of control" (p.210). A young man's self-perception of efficacy as a learner of Romance language then would be enhanced by the single-sex setting, since success as he sees it is more dependent upon his hard work and less on some random external factor.

Where is the locus of control then for coed boys? Hulse (1997) believes it resides in the coed school's social workings, where the social hierarchy, dating and mating, and

other sources of teen angst apply pressure on boys, causing them to believe they have little control over their outcomes, academic or social. I reiterate Lee and Bryk's (1986) findings that part of the success of the single-sex school is the ability of its students to separate the academic realm from the social, which facilitates an unfettered focus on their studies. Hulse (1997) comments that "...the social agenda in coeducational schools is more in charge of the coed boys than they are of themselves" (p. 9), which lends support to some of Coleman's "adolescent culture" theory discussed above, in which he claims that young people in coed environments are far more interested in their cars and the "rating and dating" game than in academic pursuits. Goodlad (1984) suggests that "It may be socially difficult in some schools to be smart unless one is regarded also as good-looking and athletic" (p. 78). The issues alluded to by Coleman and Goodlad, namely the "rating and dating" game, the "dress to impress" phenomenon, and other "boy meets girl" youth culture distractions are virtually non-existent in the single-sex environment thereby allowing students a greater sense of control over his academic outcomes. Barton (2002) found in her work on single-sex foreign language classes that the presence of girls heightened boys' awareness of a male anti-intellectual stereotype. As Hulse (1997) states (using the names "Brad" and "Cory" to denote a boys' school student and a coed school student respectively), "...Brad can more assuredly march to the beat of his own drummer, while Cory's tune may be determined by the social pressures inherent in an environment that includes girls..." (p. 7).

Understandably, in a discipline like foreign language that already stigmatizes high achievement for males for socio-cultural reasons (as discussed earlier in this chapter), the

chances for superior self-perceptions as language learners, and in turn for superior success, appear greater in the single-sex setting.

Egalitarian Attitudes

I discussed earlier how a boy's achievement in the Romance language classroom is often devalued and even viewed as "effeminate" behavior by his peers, given that the discipline has traditionally been considered a female domain. This archaic, sexist attitude is symptomatic of the coed environment, where gender roles tend to run along more narrowly defined and traditional lines. Dumais (2002) found that during the secondary years, males have an augmented sense of what the gender boundaries are, coupled with deep convictions about maintaining them. However, in single-sex schools, boys are more open to a wider definition of masculinity (Hulse, 1997) and therefore less constrained to follow the rigid model of what a young man should and should not do. Whereas the conventional wisdom initially held that coeducation dispelled sexism, numerous studies (e.g. Lockheed and Klein, 1985) evidence an interesting irony in the debate about single-sex versus coeducation: that the coed setting actually provides a more fertile forum for gender differences to *gain* prominence. Salomone (2003) suggests that coeducation was *not* in fact a panacea for deeply rooted attitudes toward young women, and I would propose that neither is it a cure-all for the very subtle yet equally rooted attitudes toward young men. According to Hulse, students from all-boys schools assume that all subjects, from English to math, to chorus, history, science, and yes, foreign language, are *boys'* subjects, and in her study she cites Foon's (1988) research that claims that single-sex

boys possess more relaxed attitudes about what are appropriate and inappropriate courses of study for them.

Is it true that coed school boys are educated in a less egalitarian environment than their all-boys school counterparts? Lee, Marks, and Byrd (1994) claim that the coed classrooms are, simply put, "...primary sites for sexist socialization" (p. 92). According to their definition of a sexist incident, i.e. "...occasions in which gender stereotypes were reinforced, regardless of whether the other gender was present" (p. 31), Lee et al noted such incidents in 54% of coed classrooms observed, 45% of all-girls classes and only 37% of single-sex boys classes (p. 103).

Hulse (1997) found based on the "Sex Role Egalitarianism Scale Test" administered to her sample that "...in all five sub-categories, the boys' school boys hold more egalitarian attitudes at a statistically significant level towards men's and women's roles in society than do coed school boys" (p. 15). The sub-categories measured were boys' attitudes on marital, parental, employment, socio-interpersonal-heterosexual, and educational roles of both men and women in our society.

Lawrie and Brown (1992) agree that secondary students in all-boys' schools hold less gender-stereotyped views than their coed counterparts, claiming that the presence of both sexes brings added salience to the gender differences, thereby providing negative reinforcement. They mention a wide scope of issues that are affected by this augmented awareness, from each gender's perceived natural abilities to their subject preferences, both of which I hope I have adequately treated earlier in this chapter under "Male and Female Cognition" and "Socio-Cultural Ramifications," but which may bear repeating. In the context of Romance language learning, we know that there exist perceptions that girls

are more naturally verbally inclined, which may well have a negative effect on a boy's self-perception as a Romance language learner. What the above studies appear to indicate is that the all-boys' school boy places little stock in those perceptions, which will certainly have a positive effect on his confidence and his learning of a Romance language. Those subject preference patterns discussed earlier (math/science/technology for boys, English/foreign language/the arts for girls) are equally irrelevant to the young man in the single-sex environment, because he does not consider them binding; they are a construct of a different environment, one that is influenced by the gender-stereotypes which thrive in the coed setting, yet remain stagnant in the single-sex venue. When Salomone (2003) celebrates the young female trombonist at the Girls High School in New York City, asserting that "At coed schools rarely would a girl play the sax or trombone..." (p. 31), she acknowledges how difficult it is for young people to ignore gender-stereotypes in their search for excellence. Whether it is girls playing in the brass section of the band, or boys reciting French poetry aloud in class, the single-sex setting allows both genders opportunities to learn and grow in a multitude of ways.

Conclusion

The four factors outlined in this literature review, namely brain-based gender differences, pedagogy, socio-cultural issues, and single-sex education versus coeducation, each represents a contributing influence upon how boys perceive their efficacy as Romance language learners and communicators. If we suspect that boys' brains are generally wired differently than girls' and in such a way as to impede their second

language acquisition, we have a duty to investigate the inequity and to provide equal opportunities for them to learn. If our pedagogy does little to counteract said impediment, in fact if it goes so far as to reinforce the deficit by emphasizing skills that are cognitively second-rate in boys (e.g. verbal skills), we have a responsibility to vary our pedagogy to provide the typical boy with a fair opportunity to learn. If our failure to attend to these brain differences and pedagogical preferences results in a socio-cultural backlash which paints excellence in Romance language as feminine behavior, we must take steps to ensure that such cultural lore does not become a permanent reality. If we conclude that single-sex education might better allow us to fulfill these duties, we should pursue that course of action.

I borrow Hulse's (1997) fictional names of Brad and Cory as representatives of boys school boys and coed school boys respectively to underline the point: whereas Cory might see himself at a cognitive gender disadvantage in a coed Romance language classroom replete with oral and written expression often on the topic of his personal feelings, Brad in his single-sex environment suffers from no such comparison. When Cory's teacher has the students engage in cooperative learning by assigning each group questions to present collaboratively to the class, these same groups in Brad's class are competing teams which strive meticulously in order to win points. When Cory's teacher requests volunteers to read Flaubert's Madame Bovary out loud in class, not a male hand goes up; in contrast, Brad's teacher has a wide range of volunteers.

It seems possible that Brad's single-sex experience is a more fertile environment for his positive self-perceptions as a Romance language student. He may be blissfully unaware of brain-based gender differences, or he may simply not care. He may benefit

from a pedagogy tailored to his gender-specific needs. Socio-cultural issues so prevalent in Cory's environment will carry little import in Brad's, where the boys feel free to achieve in non-traditional courses of study. Arnold (1997) found four principal reasons for boys' general underachievement when compared to girls:

" - inborn differences between the sexes
- acquired stereotypes and self-perception, and the social and economic influences
- the influence of the school and of teachers' attitudes
- the effects of the assessment process" (p. 5)

Or, as I have set forth herein, brain-based gender differences, socio-cultural issues, and pedagogy, all of which contribute significantly to how boys perceive their effectiveness as Romance language learners.

As a foreign language teacher, I am constantly vigilant for ways to improve my teaching and my students' learning. My sense from many years in coed and single-sex classrooms, supported by a thorough review of the appropriate literature, is that providing boys a single-sex foreign language option may be a worthwhile and entirely practical step in closing the boy/girl achievement gap in this discipline. This study will be the first step of several that I hope to take to improve foreign language achievement as an educational administrator.

Chapter III: Design of Research

Introduction

In this study, I sought to determine how students perceived of themselves as communicators in Romance language and how these perceptions related to their instructional environment. Krathwohl (1998) discusses qualitative research as appropriate when we desire "... to present the world as individuals perceive it" (p. 243). Indeed, my goal was not to find which instructional setting, single-sex or coeducation, was superior; rather it was to determine whether student perceptions of themselves as learners were affected by these settings and, if so, how. Since the factors that shape our perceptions are so diverse and numerous (and difficult to quantify), my study employed an appropriate qualitative methodology.

Using interviews and classroom observations, I was able to gain an understanding of how boys in both environments viewed themselves as Romance language communicators per ACTFL et al.'s (1999) Standard 1.1: "Students engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions" (p. 38). Were they capable? How did they measure up against their female peers? What did they perceive were the factors that facilitated their success or lack thereof? In the end I hoped to reach some conclusions about any differences that existed in these perceptions based on the single-sex and coed classroom environments.

Research Questions

What are boys' perceptions and attitudes of themselves as Romance language learners, and specifically as communicators? What are their perceptions of the impact of the gender of fellow students and the gender of the teacher? What do they believe contributes to these perceptions?

Research Methodology

As stated above, the purpose of this study was to come to an understanding via interviews and classroom observations of whether and how students' perceptions of themselves as Romance language learners and communicators were influenced by their instructional environment: single-sex or coeducational. In qualitative inquiry, these perceptions are the building blocks of the study in that they are what truly count in determining its direction. Whether or not a subject is "right" when he claims that Romance language teachers prefer female students to male students is irrelevant. What matters is his *perception* whether this is true, because he acts and reacts based on how he perceives his environment. Krathwohl (1998) uses a workplace example to illustrate the point:

> " ...evaluating her supervisory behavior on an observation scale, we might find little or no evidence of hostility. But if subordinates see the supervisor's behavior as hostile, it will affect the way they react to that person's supervision" (p. 236).

It is easy to see how the workplace depicted above might suffer despite the supervisor's best intentions. Perhaps her gruffness is misinterpreted. Maybe her caring for an ailing parent leaves her terse and irritable. It is very possible that she is not hostile at all. The only truly relevant matter for the researcher is that the perception re-creates the

reality, a reality that in this case is manifest in an altered (and negatively so) workplace environment. The resultant effects of the perception are indeed quite real. In a similar fashion, the young men that I interviewed had perceptions about their learning environment that may have had little basis in reality, yet appeared to color their sense of themselves and their effectiveness in the Romance language classroom.

Sample

The participants in my study were all current male students of Romance languages, specifically French. Throughout this study I have made mention of Spanish and Italian as prospective target languages for this study as well, simply because they, together with Portuguese, Romanian, and French, make up the family of Romance languages (although there are additional dialects such as Provençale and Catalán which have Romance roots). Given that Romanian is not a commonly spoken or taught language in American culture, it would have been impractical to include it. Portuguese, more widely spoken throughout the Brazilian community, is not a mainstream offering in foreign language programs across the country, nor does it share the socio-cultural images that lend appropriateness to this study. Italian, as discussed in Chapter One, is viewed by many as an "old Europe" language, i.e. sophisticated, refined, romantic, perhaps even feminine, characteristics that *would* have lent themselves to this study. Unfortunately, there are few schools public or private in the vicinity that offer it to their students, hence I was left to work with French and Spanish. I reiterate what I suggested in Chapter One: that since Spanish (like Portuguese) is a New World language with weaker connections to "old Europe" yet stronger perceived ties to the working class, socio-cultural issues that

support the single-sex instructional environment for Romance languages may be stronger as regards French than Spanish. For this reason and as a simple matter of practicality (i.e. I engaged in multiple classroom observations in two schools with numerous interviews), my study focused on one language: French.

The sample consisted of twelve boys from one coeducational public high school (where I was formerly employed) and twelve boys from one all-boys Catholic private high school, each within twenty-five miles of the other. "Campbell" Public High School, a moderately sized coed institution (710 students) with an average student-teacher ratio of 23 to 1 in grades 9 through 12, is situated in an affluent suburb within fifteen miles of Boston, Massachusetts. Despite its participation in a program that buses minority children into suburban schools, Campbell remains attended largely by upper middle class white children from college educated families. Approximately 99% of graduating seniors go on to attend college, many of them to highly selective institutions. "Patrick" High School, a private, Catholic, all-boys high school is in the same metropolitan area, enjoys a student-teacher ratio of 21 to 1, with a student body of 1000 9th through 12th graders. As a college preparatory school, it too sends nearly all of its graduating seniors to competitive colleges (Campbell and Patrick High Schools are fictitious names, employed to protect the confidentiality of participants in the study). Letters of Consent for Research for both institutions can be found in appendix D of the appendices section.

Participants were predominantly Caucasian adolescents of similar social/economic backgrounds and were all native English speakers. I mention in Chapter One my initial intent to avoid a racially diverse sample lest such a variable carry disproportionate effects on the results of this study, which sought to establish a majority

culture condition. In particular, I was attempting to avoid findings that might be attributed rather to the Achievement Gap than to the factors I cite above in Chapter Two. Ultimately I was compelled to widen the racial composition of my two sample sets to include one Asian student from my coed sample and two from my single-sex sample because there were not enough Caucasian students to interview. Given that Asian and Caucasian American students tend to occupy the same side of the Achievement Gap divide, I felt this was a relatively harmless concession. Nevertheless, one of my recommendations for further research at the conclusion of this study is to investigate minority student perceptions and how they correspond to Caucasian/Asian perceptions.

In a similar way, my original intent was to work with *moderately* successful individuals, i.e. *C+/B+* range students, in order to control for superior and inferior performing students who tend to excel or struggle regardless of the setting. A student in an all-boys school might unjustifiably lay blame at the fact that there are no girls in the classroom to make the class interesting, when in reality the source of his poor performance is his work ethic, which would likely remain unchanged (or suffer still more) with the same result in the coed environment. However, moderate class size and limited numbers of boys in each class impeded my ability to control this variable. This is to say that given my design of twelve interviews per class and the assumption that some 20% might fall outside of the moderately successful range of C+/B+, the classes would have had to contain fifteen boys by conservative estimate. Neither school had French classes with enough boys to support the attempt to control either this variable or the racial variable discussed in the previous paragraph. Thus in the end, no grade requirement was made. My first interview question with the boys ("Are you a good student of French…?")

indicated a normal distribution of performance levels, i.e. the boys responses appeared to reflect a grade range of "A" to "C-." It is important that I point out that due to this issue of limited numbers of suitable interview candidates in each class, I had to involve a second class at the Campbell School (coed) of a different level (second year as opposed to third year), yet which was taught by the same teacher and which shared the same instructional emphasis on Standard 1.1.

This study complied with human subject protection requirements; students were advised that their anonymity would be protected at all times, and that they were at liberty to decline or withdraw from the study without prejudice. Administrators, parents, and the students received a written explanation of the study's purpose and its parameters (see appendices section for reference). I made it clear both in the written documents and verbally that during the interview process, participants should answer honestly and feel free not to answer if they were so inclined. This may have been particularly important in the coed school because it was my place of employment up until June of 2007. I was familiar with some of this portion of my sample, having taught or coached several of them at some point. Therefore, in order to maintain proper integrity to the study, I doubly emphasized the importance of their honesty without adverse consequence.

All participants in this study were adequately protected in accordance with Boston College's Initial IRB Review Application's (version 01, 11/15/2006) "expedited review" status, which states that "Probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests" (45 CFR 46.102). Understanding that there is always some risk when inquiring

young people about how they rate their own effectiveness in relation to that of their peers, effectiveness in the academic realm for adolescents is probably no more a sensitive issue than most others, and certainly less than those of the social realm. Students and their parents were required to sign informed consent letters prior to student participation in this study, which can be found under Appendix C.

Pre-Study Work

As a means to control the variables in this study, it was necessary to seek out classes that were similar in more than just student racial and socio-economic backgrounds. Even classes of the exact same students commonly undergo metamorphoses as a result of such simple variables as the time of day (many teachers lament having their classes *before* lunch, others *after* lunch), the class subject, and of course, the teacher. It was essential that I strive to work with classes in both the single-sex and coed environments that shared a common emphasis: the communicative skill as outlined in ACTFL's et al. Standard 1.1 (1999). I approached the principal of Patrick School and the foreign language department head of the Campbell School for recommendations of teachers who valued this communicative standard. After a discussion with the teachers in which I summarized both my long-term and short-term goals, i.e. the details of my dissertation study and my search for classes that were compatible, I reviewed with them the class compatibility matrix and the phase one observation checklist (both found in the appendices section) for their approval. Thus, the classroom observation portion of my data collection consisted of two parts: phase one, to help me determine if the two classes did indeed share such communicative emphases, and

phase two (discussed below), wherein I collected data on individuals and their self-perceptions as second language learners.

Classroom Observations

In order to obtain a varied data set which would help me work toward triangulation, I first observed classes of those participants to be interviewed. As mentioned above, the coed segment of my data collection took place at the school where I had been employed for eleven years, which I felt was an advantage given that I had come to some of these individuals as a known entity, having previously built up a level of trust and familiarity which lent itself to both the interview and observation processes. Hughes (1971) claims that the non-participant observer who is considered from the culture but somehow feels disconnected from it often makes for an objective observer. As a recent French and a Spanish teacher in a relatively small school, I was familiar with virtually all of the students in the community. Peer observations were a common foreign language department event, so students were accustomed to visits by other language teachers. My sense is that my familiarity with the culture and with the participants (in both the interview and observations settings) was helpful in procuring good data. I will of course return to this issue in Chapter Five under the "Problems with the Research" section, as some might be prone to believe that such familiarity leads participants to respond as they assume the researcher *wants* them to respond, thereby compromising validity.

Indeed, in my coed sample I observed and subsequently interviewed two former students of mine, which I trust compelled them to carry on as usual and refrain from any "grandstanding" that visitors tend to see of the typical adolescent boy when they visit his

classroom. Moreover, having taught some of these individuals and made it my daily duty to read their levels of comprehension, quite often through non-verbal cues such as body language, I believe I was able once again to "read" their perceptions of themselves in the Romance language classroom while benefiting from the "disconnect" alluded to above that a former teacher has with ex-students.

Having myself attended an all-boys Catholic secondary school similar to the one which so graciously agreed to help me in my study, I felt a certain kinship with the single-sex school and its culture. My familiarity with the overall environment (i.e. Catholic, all-boys, Romance language) although weaker than that of the coed school, did in fact help provide me with a sufficient proximity to the salient issues yet with adequate objectivity.

Having the classroom observations precede the interviews helped drive effective interactions with my subjects, as I had considerable data on which to base my line of questioning. For example, in my observations of the single-sex class I noticed a boy who was constantly participating, his hand up, down, then up again. In our interview I departed from my line of questioning to get at how this participation affected his speaking abilities (he participated solely in French), his rapport with his classmates, and to what degree would the presence of girls in the classroom alter his behavior? Each of these add-on inquiries reaped rich information to this study. Seeing these dynamics at work first in their particular environment assisted me in narrowing the focus of my interviews and allowed me to delve into more depth with my subjects.

Creswell (1998) discusses the role of securing a good contact as a means of entry into the field venue, commonly referred to as a *gatekeeper*, or an insider who facilitates

entry into the field situation. The common gatekeepers in schools and school systems are superintendents, school administrators, department heads, and teachers. Although I collected data from two locations, one was my place of employment, hence, entry into that domain was quite easy, as were the benefits acquired from a good rapport between the assisting teacher(s) and me, i.e. relative trust and acceptance by the community that ameliorates data collection. In the all-boys school, my contact was a fellow doctoral candidate who acts as the school's principal, certainly more than adequate in getting my foot in the door; nevertheless and as discussed above, I involved the teachers in the dialogue surrounding the decision to allow the observations. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) assert that:

> "Getting permission to conduct the study involves more than getting an official blessing. It involves laying the groundwork for good rapport with those with whom you will be spending time, so they will accept you and what you are doing. Helping them to feel that they had a hand in allowing you in will help your research" (p. 82).

Thomas (2005) believes that researchers who claim to observe free of preconceived notions as respects their research may be kidding themselves, citing the adage "what you see is what you came looking for" (p. 92). He suggests (contrary perhaps to the traditional qualitative school of thought) entering the classroom with specifics on what to look for, specifics that are guided, naturally, by one's research questions. My questions entailed boys' self-perceptions as Romance language learners and communicators, their beliefs about the impact of classmate and teacher gender on these perceptions, and what contribute to these perceptions, so I tried to be sensitive to situations which lent themselves to this type of manifestation.

It was my intention to discuss with my cooperating teachers prior to the lessons what it was that they intended to cover so as to avoid needlessly observing a class that did not exercise the communicative skills: a movie, a test, or a review session for a term exam would not be ideal agenda items in a class that I would want to observe to get applicable data. These conversations with the cooperating teachers brought the added benefit of knowing what was coming and preparing an observational procedure such as "one-zero sampling" (Thomas, 2005) to record student reaction to the poem or the topic of paired discussion. This procedure consists of recording a target behavior, in this case the reaction to the teacher's handing out of a poem or mention of the paired speaking topic, in a tally format each time the behavior appears: a groan of displeasure, a smile, an exaggerated roll of the eyes, another smile, comfort offered to a taciturn classmate who is being asked to use the oral skill, might all be efficiently tallied as behaviors that reflect his self-perceptions in the classroom.

Thomas (2005) recommends other observation techniques for the classroom that seem equally useful. "Time sampling" (p. 95), is where the observer records one subject's every action/behavior over a period of a few minutes. This might be useful in focusing on a student's preparation for a short oral presentation in French: does he work with the resolve of a confident foreign language speaker, someone with healthy self-perceptions? "Multiple scan sampling" (p. 95) allows the researcher to link time samples of separate individuals so as to gauge group dynamics. As a mixed group of students are working on French pronunciation, I might focus on boy after boy to judge how each is inhibited (or not) by the presence of girls to master proper pronunciation. When I need to gather data about unprompted Romance language use in the classroom as a reflection of high student

self-esteem, I might try "sampling a selected type of behavior" (p. 95), wherein this is the lone focus. Finally, "sequence sampling" (p. 95) compels one to observe a participant from the beginning through the end of an activity, e.g. students who are asked to write an account of their weekend for the first ten minutes of class: does my subject get right to work (a sign of confidence) or does he hesitate, asking for clarification from a neighbor? Is he overly reliant on a dictionary? This procedure is effective for comparing different students' coping strategies for like tasks.

During my observations I trained my focus on male students' classroom performance: how they interacted with the teacher (and how this might have been affected by teacher gender), their classmates (and how this might have been affected as well by classmate gender), and the material presented. In every case I took copious field notes, observing each class for three class periods.

Interviews

My dominant strategy for data collection was partially structured interviews. Krathwohl (1998) claims that interviews are especially effective tools when we seek to understand others' perceptions of their situation: "its meaning to them, what is especially significant about it to them, what might be significant to others but is less so...to them..." (p. 286). When considering which point along the interview continuum to establish the interview process, it is important, as Creswell (1998) points out, to "...Determine what type of interview is practical and will net the most useful information to answer research questions" (p. 124). Any discussion on such sensitive issues as how an adolescent sees himself as compared to his peers is unlikely to come easily; many adolescent boys, as

discussed in Chapter Two, have difficulty articulating their feelings and may be loath to discuss their achievement or lack thereof. Others overestimate their abilities, or may use false bravado to mask insecurities (Riordan, 1990). Thus, partially structured interviews seemed to suit my needs best since they provided enough structure to get at the topics that pertained to my research questions, yet allowed me enough latitude to build rapport with my subjects, rephrase and redirect questions, and permitted them to tell me their stories.

Effective interviews are those that set the interviewee at ease so that he can relax, open up, and provide information germane to the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). They "...produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives" (p. 97). A more structured interview format, i.e. one in which I carefully control the conversation, may well have inhibited the respondent by conveying the message that my goals for the interview were more important than his. In fact, it was *his* self-perceptions I was trying to get at, so *he* played the lead role in dictating the direction of the discussion. My role then was reduced to keeping tangential conversation limited and to encouraging the respondent to reflect on the deeper issues related to him as a Romance language learner.

Creswell (1998) recommends drawing up an interview protocol of several pages with a half-dozen open-ended questions and plenty of space to take descriptive and reflective notes. My sense is that my somewhat longer list of interview questions allowed me to get deeper meaning by setting hypothetical situations before subjects to gauge their reactions and to draw connections to my research questions. For example, whereas Creswell might have advised that one of my six questions to my single-sex sample be "How would having ten girls introduced into your French class affect your performance?" I felt that a follow-up hypothetical question designed to press for more

detail would be fruitful: "Would you be more, less, or equally willing to recite a poem out loud before the class with these new girls present?" This proved to be the case. This second question supported the goal of the first by putting the respondent to the task of reflecting on girls and their hypothetical influence upon him in the classroom yet went further by providing a commonplace example that he could relate to. Furthermore, since it was a more concrete and situational question, it may have provided the respondent with added perspective on which to ruminate. Whereas the answer to the first question might have been in some cases "They wouldn't affect me at all," the second question did convince more than one respondent otherwise. The interview question protocols are found in appendices A (coed) and B (single-sex) at the back of this document.

As discussed above, some of my line of questioning relied on what I had observed prior to the interview in the classroom observations, as I sought clarification for some verbal or non-verbal participation, or some reaction to behavior of another student. For example, I asked one Campbell School boy who claimed he was not learning very much in his class if this might be in part because he so rarely practiced his French by participating voluntarily in class. This exchange led to a deeper conversation (and some "on the spot" synthesizing on his part) about the single-sex versus the coed environment as perhaps a more friendly setting for speaking French.

Since I was interviewing students from two distinct environments, that is single-sex and coeducational, some of my questions had to vary slightly because the two learning environments are so distinct. In the above example, I asked my coed sample what effect *removing* the girls from their class might be, and whether they would be more, less, or equally likely to recite the poem. In some cases, I chose to omit a question

for one set of students, such as "What does the typical French language 'star' look like?" This might be a more appropriate question for the coed sample, to see if they respond with a male or female model, but for obvious reasons was less effective or germane for the single-sex students.

Given that my interview format was somewhat more unique (two distinct sample sets) than the usual, and since I wanted to follow standard qualitative practice (Krathwohl, 1998), I subjected my protocols to pilot testing to help me iron out unforeseen snags. I found that some questions were not as high-yielding as anticipated, and thus needed to be revised (or even dropped altogether). In any event, the pilot test was worthwhile for improving the product, its delivery, and the results (Krathwohl, 1998). It made sense to attempt to replicate the conditions of the real interviews, so I enlisted two male students of a coed institution and two male students of a single-sex institution to carry out these practice interviews.

Further discussion of the interview process is found in the next chapter under that heading. Once this process was complete, as it was my intention that the boys feel their input had been fairly and accurately depicted, copies of their interview transcripts were forwarded to them with the request that they review and advise of perceived inconsistencies and otherwise offer any pertinent feedback.

Data Gathering Procedures

My general mode of recording during the classroom observations was simultaneous note-taking. I recognized the chief pitfall to this approach is that some pertinent data may have been missed as notes are taken (Thomas, 2005) - a meaningful

nod or a grimace that conveys an important message. But this was balanced of course by the superior detail and accuracy that simultaneous note-taking brought to the exercise. As events occurred, I recorded them. I could focus on whomever I deemed most important at the given moment. Furthermore, as a former foreign language classroom teacher myself, I believe I was somewhat capable of reading the ebb and flow of the foreign language class; when to lower my head to write, and when to delay that action for a more opportune moment.

Although I forwent videotaping and audiotaping in favor of live observations, they are widely accepted as viable options for classroom observations (Mehan, 1979). Advantages in taping a class are that the researcher can return to the events multiple times, and can ask others for their interpretation of the events. Drawbacks include a keen student awareness of the recording (with possible staged behavior) as well as reduced peripheral vision and agility for video and often inferior sound quality for audio. Logistically speaking, it was difficult to ask a third party the favor of tending to the recording device, especially since I was a guest in both schools. Hence, note-taking was my fieldwork *modus operandi*.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) make several good recommendations which I integrated into my data-collection procedures. Chief among them was the need for discretion. Since students at both venues were curious about what I was writing, I endeavored to write in neutral language without calling attention to myself. Information gathered on individual students was not shared with their peers. In both schools I dressed as I normally do (jacket and tie), as this seemed natural to the students from my school, and was a required dress code at the single-sex school.

The subject interviews were conducted over three weeks in late December and early January of 2007-2008. Although I did take copious notes during the interviews, followed up by memo-writing at the end of each day's sessions, the dialogues were recorded digitally as well. A more in-depth description of this process is found in the next chapter.

Distinguishing between two types of notes is important when taking field notes (Lancy, 1993; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992): descriptive, wherein the researcher objectively takes note of what takes place, and reflective, wherein the researcher records his subjective interpretation of what is occurring, where "The emphasis is on speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices" (p. 121). Suggestions range from devising a two-column document with the left side for descriptive and the right for reflective, to registering the reflective in parentheses. I made use of a dual black/red pen (commonly found in schools); black for descriptive, red for reflective, to more quickly and easily identify the content of the notes.

Memo-Writing

Charmaz (1995) recommends early memo writing as an effective means of staying ahead of myriad data resulting from interviews and observations and as a way to help direct and focus later data collection. A wry smile that may imply enormous meaning can be lost if it is not noted down during the interview or soon after. It could indicate something of significance, such as the general belief on the part of adolescent boys that girls tend to talk a lot more than boys. Yet another wry smile on the part of a subsequent participant might indicate a disdain for such a stereotype though. These types of occurrences (non-verbal as well as verbal), rich in meaning, are easily lost if not

tended to shortly thereafter. As such, memo-writing was an essential part of my data collection and figured significantly in my data-analysis. As I began to notice emergent patterns or other germane issues during interviews, it was helpful to capture these in memo form shortly after the interviews so that I could more easily begin to predict data inter-relationships. This information is not to be confused with reflective notes, or those observations I made that related to my spontaneous interpretation of events. Memo-writing is to be sure a reflective practice, but it is reflection of a higher and more general order, one that seeks to find patterns in the overall compilation of data. With memos, I did as Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest, by making "...deeper and more general sense of what is happening ...begin[ning] to explain it in a conceptually coherent way" (p. 272).

Ely (1991) recommends that the researcher should write memos about once every three sets of fields notes in order not 1) to allow an over-accumulation of information, and 2) to miss opportunities to re-direct the course of the data collection. I heeded his advice by sitting down at the end of each interview/observation day and composing a memo summary and analysis for each interview/observation.

Method of Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) metaphorically depict the beginning of the data analysis process as a gym floor covered with thousands of children's toys, each requiring categorization. The question is how best to go about this, for there are various ways to identify toys: by applicable age group, manufacturer, color, size, shape, or other qualification. Clearly the decision on how to classify the toys, as with a study's data, is

based on one's goals. If the toys are defective and are to be returned, then the decision is easy: one simply sorts them based on manufacturer (p. 166). When looking at the multitude of data for a study and how it relates to the study's goals, the research questions serve as a guide for such coding, for they are in the end what will be answered by the information collected.

As per Krathwohl's (1998) recommendation, I read through the data numerous times to begin the process of discovering emergent patterns. "Reading and rereading the data seems to facilitate seeing patterns. It chunks the material in your mind so that you get past the details to the larger picture" (p. 309). As I began to see commonalities and annotate them in the margins, my coding process had begun. I strived not only to observe and take note of these relationships in the data, but to reflect on why they were important. This I believe guided me from the rudimentary stages toward a more refined coding, for as I went from identifying categories to noticing emergent patterns in how the data interrelated, I began to get a clearer picture of how the issues were tied to my research questions. As these various categories began to take shape, I input the code names, cases, observation notes, and interview transcripts into a *HyperResearch*© database, which facilitated the coding process and enabled easy retrieval and manipulation of coded data. The source data was first auto coded, a quick and easy step which assigned codes to stock words or phrases found throughout my source information. For example, a very common descriptor in my interview texts was the word "distraction," used often in discussing girls' influence on boys in the French classroom. The program automatically coded all encounters with this term in my data under the "girls a distraction" code, which in most cases was the appropriate designation. Autocoding was a helpful tool and a good early

step in the overall coding process; however, it is impossible to effectively code using this feature alone, as neighboring words, context, even intonation can alter the real meaning of words and as a consequence, their code assignments. In some cases boys used other terms to describe this element of distraction: "It's hard to focus," or "We get off track," data that pertained to their distraction in the presence of girls which was not captured by the auto coding process. Strauss (1987) talks to the issue of word nuance and the challenge in accurately coding language in context when he cites the myriad ways some of his students coded the first word in the following interview response of a disabled man getting into the shower: "*Once* I'm in the shower, I'm pretty much on my own..." (p. 57). The word "once" can be interpreted as a recognition of independence (as in "finally!"), or indicative of the end of one phase of his day and the beginning of the next, or even an expression of the significant effort it took to get into the shower. So much depends on context that is beyond the scope of auto coding. Therefore, the manual coding feature was used extensively and proved an excellent supplement. In this stage, appropriate sections of interview transcripts, memos, and field notes were highlighted and assigned codes for quick retrieval by either case, code, or other criteria. Once all my source data was loaded, information could be manipulated in an appropriate way (e.g. code frequency analysis, reports, hypothesis testing, etc.) to inform the research questions.

My coding scheme was derived inductively in that I let the data define the codes, not vice-versa. I felt this was crucial because not all phenomena were expected or came to light in an anticipated way. For example, as each Campbell School boy, in defending his coed learning environment, mentioned the importance of the adolescent's social development, the concept of the corresponding code "sees coed as a social vehicle" was

born. Notwithstanding, my research protocols did prove useful as a roadmap for my open coding stage, as they helped me initially group the data into categories. As alluded to above, using *Hyperresearch* I was able to call up responses to each protocol question for analysis and annotation of content and variation within and between schools. Since the protocols provided a conceptual flow on the themes of my research questions, they guided the axial coding stage as well as I connected sub-categories or properties (Creswell, 1998). One student declared that he liked his coed class because his friends were in it, but that he wasn't fond of the teacher because she was constantly on him. On the surface, neither of these circumstances appears to relate directly back to the "sees coed as a social vehicle " code, but his classroom behavior and other comments derived from the interview revealed a correlation: he was entirely disinterested in the academic side, and completely engrossed in the social side. He engaged in frequent banter with these friends, and was constantly reproved by the teacher for doing so. In fact, he did like the class, yet for the wrong reasons. The connectedness of these bits of data and many others like them led me to certain conclusions about my research questions, allowing me to weave twenty-four individual stories into one. I used a total of 93 original codes. Finally, and as this previous example illustrates, the combination of class observations with interviews provided for a very robust data set that allowed me to triangulate for more precision in my assertions.

Conclusion

This study was designed to determine how boys perceive themselves as Romance language learners and communicators, and whether these perceptions are a reflection of

their instructional environment, specifically single-sex or coeducational. Many would agree that boys are in crisis in the foreign language classroom. As Carr and Pauwels (2006) indicate, once they have struggled through their secondary foreign language requirement (however many years it may be), "...boys for the most part disappear" (p.1) from the Romance language classroom. Some implications for further research may well be how we as an educational community work to overcome the self-perpetuating crisis of a major secondary discipline's almost complete dependence on females for its survival. Why do boys effectively remove themselves from the Romance language equation is a vital question. The answer, I believe, may lie in their self-perceptions as learners in the field.

As discussed previously, given the task of discovering the reasons and sources of boys' self-perceptions, partially structured interviews supplemented by pre-interview classroom observations served as my data-collection vehicles. Carr and Pauwels (2006) cite an example that is particularly pertinent to my study and which may indirectly support my choice for data collection: while interviewing single-sex boys using the focused interview format, they asked if the absence of girls was relevant to their healthy attitudes about Romance languages. Their initial and very quick reaction was a resounding "no." "But one boy disagreed: 'I don't know, you know...in a mixed school...there'd be all those girls, looking at you! That would be hard! I'd probably shut up...' (Jason, 15)" (p. 107). The honesty and integrity of this boy's response is compelling (as well as is his courage). The other boys quickly backtracked, giving reasons to support how girls would adversely affect their Romance language performance. As mentioned in Chapter One, I did not be make use of the focused

interview format for the very reason that peer pressure may have inhibited the emergence of honest answers to sensitive questions like "Would you be intimidated by the presence of girls in your French class?" Not every boy is like Jason; in fact I would wager that many would have stifled their honesty and gone along with the crowd. In my one-on-one format, I was able to employ some non-directive strategies, to tie in rejoinder questions that I was confident allowed the Jason in most of them to emerge. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, lists of pre-determined questions, or protocols, for my single-sex and coed samples are found in Appendices A and B respectively.

In conclusion, so many leaders today, from politicians to principals, heads of state to heads of households, espouse the importance of thinking globally and acting as global citizens. Gaining proficiency in a second language is a logical step toward that end: it adds cultural diversity to our persona, teaches us to assume another's perspective, and contributes to improved global communication. For boys, however, the call for a new global awareness is falling on deaf ears. Despite this new age characterization of our world as a global village, many boys opt out of Romance language study as soon as possible. We are heading into this global era in which the "players...will consist largely of all-girl teams [which] seems to be of minimal concern to educators, parents, or to students themselves" (p. 1). Something needs to be done. Carr and Pauwels (2006) mention boys' "stoicism" in the foreign language classroom, that is, a loathing to ask for help when confused about material, lest they appear less than autonomous and independent. Most good teachers know that you have to inquire, cajole, prod, and coerce at times to get them to identify and explain the problem. I believe this is what I succeeded in doing.

Chapter IV: Findings

Overview

As outlined in the previous chapter, this study began with an attempt to control one of the more important variables in assessing student communicative skill in a foreign language: teacher pedagogy. How well a student communicates in French is in no small part related to the emphasis his or her teacher places on that skill. Understandably, validity issues could arise when comparing the self-perceptions of students whose teacher rarely uses the target language in class to those whose teacher uses an immersion model. Students who are required to use the language in class as part of the daily routine will be much more likely to feel good about themselves as speakers of French than students for whom French in class is the exception and not the rule. Therefore, the first step in executing this study was to settle upon two classes with similar emphases on Standard 1.1, which stipulates that students be able to "...engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions" (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages et al; p. 9).

After providing the principal of the Patrick School and the World Languages department head at the Campbell School copies of Standard 1.1, these individuals were able to recommend French teachers in their respective schools whose pedagogies most

closely aligned with its requirements. My conversations with these teachers, followed by one class observation per class (referred to as phase one observation) confirmed this. In attending level III classes from each school, I found remarkable similarities:

- Classes conducted almost entirely in French (exception: advanced grammar concepts)
- A mix of teacher-centered and student-centered speaking activities
- Paired speaking in the 7-10 minute range
- Class discussion of a reading
- 5-7 minutes work on proper pronunciation
- Both teachers provided similar amounts of instructional feedback, and both sets of students used French as per Standard 1.1 between 12-17 times per class

(See Appendix E for phase one data collection forms)

Prior to the beginning of these classes, I introduced my project to the students and handed out consent forms to those interested in participating. Students were given a week to have their forms properly signed and returned. Participants were randomly chosen from the this pool (in the level III classes, this mostly entailed eliminating only one or two). I reiterate that due to insufficient numbers in the level III coed class, I was compelled to enlist a level II class taught by the same teacher. My phase one observation of this class revealed characteristics quite similar to those cited above, with the exception of the 5-7 minutes' work on pronunciation. Although there was some incidental and individualized feedback on pronunciation, it was not a formal segment of this class. In a

subsequent conversation with the teacher however, she indicated that more formalized work on pronunciation is indeed part of her pedagogical routine.

Two pilot interviews were conducted at each school to test the interview protocols. Debriefing of these students proved enormously useful as they were able to tell me which questions lacked clarity, which ones might be unusually sensitive, and how I might better approach my subjects to maximize the data collection. One student suggested more redundancy of key concepts as a way to "...break kids down, get them to admit they get nervous when there are girls around."

My single-sex and coed sample class samples now determined, and my interview protocol beta tested, I was ready to re-enter each class for my phase two observations and subject interviews.

The phase two observation stage in both schools consisted of two observations per class. The general purpose of this second round of observations was to observe both sets of boys in their respective learning environments and to acquire data that reflected how they perceived themselves as speakers of French (Standard 1.1). These data sets were then used to supplement the chief data sets which emanated from the individual interviews.

Student classroom behavior can be a clear indicator of what the individual feels or thinks; on occasion, clearer even than what he *says* he feels or thinks. What was evident over the course of the data analysis was that some of the interview data provided by individuals was in conflict with the observed data. What students said was not always what they did. For example, one boy in a coed class claimed in his interview that French came easily to him, yet as I observed him in class I noted that he consistently responded

to his French teacher in English and was very dependent on classmates for help throughout the class activities. How did he reconcile this in our interview? By acknowledging that yes, he should be speaking more French in class, and that his friends (who certainly clarified things for him in English) explain things much better than the teacher. The phase two observations then truly did allow me to question, redirect, even hold some students accountable when I encountered inconsistencies.

Clearly one of the more important factors contributing to student achievement is teacher quality and overall effectiveness. Consequently, observing the respective teachers in their classes became a secondary focus of these visits. As discussed earlier, I attempted to control the teacher pedagogy issue through my phase one observations. The issue of teacher quality and effectiveness is more challenging still, as teachers can use similar techniques and approaches thereby putting into practice like pedagogies, yet deliver the product at different rates of success.

As a trained teacher evaluator with experience on both sides of the evaluation process, I found my subject teachers to be sufficiently similar in effectiveness. The coed Campbell School teacher was superior in her knowledge of the content (she was after all a native speaker), in her differentiated approach to the variety of learning styles in her class, and in her patience with mistakes. Her work in the language lab on pronunciation, the paired speaking segment, and the instructional feedback for both activities displayed an understanding of varied levels of readiness, interest, and learning styles. Using the "single-call" feature of the lab, she coached shier students privately on their pronunciation; similarly, using the "paired-call" feature, she joined in paired conversation and offered feedback. Back in the classroom, she displayed excellent patience with

student reluctance to use French (a much different scenario now without the privacy of the language lab), and with error correction in general. The Patrick School teacher for his part, though not a native speaker, had an impressive level of French. His strengths lay more in his organizational skills, his ability to connect the individual class goals to the larger course goals, and his classroom awareness. Students were provided with a daily agenda on the board, and were consistently reminded how class content fit into the class's overarching goals. He was quite adept at reading student comprehension and when and to what degree re-presentation of material was in order. In discussion of a dialogue reading, some students appeared confused at the expression "à la prochaine" (until the next [time]) which he seamlessly clarified with " à la prochaine...fois (time)!" followed by "later!" in English, to illustrate that we too often omit words in our phraseology.

Comparing teacher effectiveness is a difficult task and an inexact science to say the least. Much of teacher effectiveness is dependent upon the students' learning needs and styles. More timid students may have preferred the Campbell School teacher's relaxed approach in the language lab, whereas students who need to see the "big picture" might like the Patrick School teacher's constant reminders that knowledge of French is worthwhile. In any event, the question of teacher quality is a factor that is difficult to predict, evaluate, and control; as such, it may have had undue influence in the reliability of this study. I will return to this question in Chapter Five, under the Limitations to the Study section.

The Participants

Participants in this study were 24 current male high school students of French

(level III and II); 12 from the coed Campbell School, and 12 from the single-sex Patrick School, all selected at random from the pool of volunteers. As discussed earlier, my coed sample was culled from two French classes because there were only 9 students volunteers in the level III class; consequently, I observed classes and interviewed three boys from a level II class to supplement my coed sample.

In order to protect the anonymity of all subjects interviewed, pseudonyms were assigned. Throughout the study, students from the coed environment bear the names beginning with letters *A* through *L*, and students from the single-sex setting employ names starting with *N* through *Y*. Below is a chart which summarizes the samples by name, school, and level of French:

Table Four: Interview Subjects by Pseudonym, School, and Level of French

Name	Campbell (coed)	Patrick (single-sex)	Level of French
Adam	X		3
Ben	X		3
Chuck	X		3
Don	X		3
Evan	X		3
Frank	X		3
George	X		3
Hank	X		2
Irwin	X		3
Jamie	X		3
Ken	X		2
Len	X		2
Nigel		X	3
Oscar		X	3
Paul		X	3
Quentin		X	3
Rick		X	3
Seamus		X	3
Tris		X	3
Unser		X	3
Vince		X	3
Wynn		X	3
Xavier		X	3
Yann		X	3

The Interview Process

As discussed in Chapter Three, semi-structured interviews seemed to suit the needs of this study since they provided enough structure to get at the topics that pertained to the research questions, yet allowed enough latitude to build rapport with the subjects, rephrase and redirect questions, and permit them to provide clear data. This interview format is an appropriate balance between the highly structured interview which reduces probing and re-directing, and the unstructured interview which can wander off topic (Merriam, 1998). Twenty-four boys, twelve from single-sex and twelve from coed schools, were selected at random and interviewed. Interviews ran from 35 to 48 minutes and were conducted from December 20, 2007 until January 12, 2008. Two of the twelve coed school interviews took place in my office, and the balance of ten were recorded in the Campbell School's Assistant-Principal's Conference Room. The Patrick School subjects were interviewed in a classroom, the school's boardroom, or in one case, the local town library. The library interview was arranged because the school itself was closed, and although I was initially concerned about ambient noise interfering with our interview (or our talking disturbing patrons), this was not the case in the end. The other 23 interviews were completed without problem, with the only interruption coming from a PA announcement during one interview. Interviews were recorded digitally on an Ipod, as I took field notes. The question protocols, presented at the end of this document as Appendices A and B, differed slightly based on the single-sex or coed status of the student, and in both cases provided sufficient guidance in the direction of the conversation without constraining the flow.

Findings

General Self-Assessments

In trying to ascertain a young man's perception of himself as a speaker of French, it is important to get him to provide an *overall* self-assessment: how is he as a student of French, and how satisfied is he with the amount he is learning? Both subject sets came forth with similar responses to these questions, with the majority evaluating themselves as competent or better in the class. Of my single-sex sample, nine identified themselves as good to excellent in the class, with three suggesting they were average or below average. The coed group split with seven self-assessments ranging from good to excellent, and five below average. What I found notable when comparing these two data sets was the degree to which each added qualifiers to their self-assessments: of the seven Campbell (coed) boys who felt they were good to excellent students of French, five added that they were not learning as much as they could. Conversely on the single-sex side, of the nine with healthy self-perceptions as French students, only one indicated dissatisfaction with the amount he had learned. Those five Campbell boys and three Patrick boys who viewed themselves as mediocre or below students of French generated interesting information as well: three out of the five coed boys asserted they were either uncomfortable in the class, did not see enough value in the class to participate, or felt their learning was adversely affected by lack of classroom control on the part of the teacher. On the other hand, two of the three Patrick (single-sex) boys felt that although they were not exceptional students of French, they were nevertheless learning a lot in the

class, with the third boy only able to concede that he was not sure whether he was or was not learning a lot.

It is important to remember that these data reflect how these individuals see themselves as students of French, not necessarily as communicators in French (as per Standard 1.1). This said, it appears that the single-sex sample has higher overall self-perceptions in the French language classroom as evidenced by their beliefs that they are appropriately challenged and attaining some level of mastery of the content, sentiments that are somewhat less present in the coed sample responses. It would seem sensible that these high or low self-perceptions of general performance would "trickle down" to the more specific skill sets in French: reading, writing, listening, and, of course, speaking. We will now look at more specific data relative to Standard 1.1.

Emphasis on Standard 1.1

As discussed earlier, one of the pre-conditions for this study was that classes with similar pedagogical foci with regard to Standard 1.1 be compared so as to control as best I could the natural variability that exists between two classes of different teachers. In fact, my first round of observations was designed to ensure an adequate measure of similarity between the two instructors' approaches. I found that both teachers conveyed similar emphases on the communicative skill and the students agreed. Students from both environments understood that developing the ability to "...engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions" (Standard 1.1 of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, et al; 1999) was important to the teacher and crucial to success in the class.

My in-class observations revealed that the coed teacher, a native speaker, had more trouble convincing the students to buy into the classroom immersion model, as a significant amount of English was spoken in the non-structured moments. For example, many questions for clarification were initially phrased in English, with valuable class time wasted as the teacher coaxed the students to speak French. My sense from these classroom observations, further supported by the interviews was that the coed students understood the importance of Standard 1.1, knew it was important to the teacher, but had not grasped ownership of it. Jamie stated: "Yes, she does emphasize it but not everyone does it." Adam added, "She wants you to explain in French rather than give a translation. But somehow that hasn't stuck in yet..."

Personal responsibility for developing as a speaker of French appeared stronger within the single-sex sample, as those responses reflected a willingness to share the collective goal of improving this skill. When asked how he knew his teacher stressed the speaking skill in class, Oscar replied:

> "He just does. You know, he wants us to participate and speak and he calls on us. And participation is a big part of his grade, so you know, you have to speak to participate and you know, to get a good grade, so he really emphasizes that part."

Expectations for developing the speaking skill and seeing these expectations as part of the class routine were evident as well among the single-sex group. Wynn asserted,

> "That's one of his major things, like the first 10 or 15 minutes of class, he'll usually bring up something about politics or current event,... then he'll just have people try as best they as they can to express their opinions in French and kind of get what they think across...so it just gets us all in the French speaking mode coming out of a class like English."

Evan, a student at the coed Campbell High School, initially set out to explain the challenge of asking clarifying questions in French, yet came forth rather with a statement about his self-confidence in expressing himself in the language:

> "I think that one of the problems is that kids take a long time to process the language just because – rather than just hearing the words and instantly putting – as far as you say, you have to take the words, translate into English, then figure out what they would say back in English and then translate that back to French, rather than just responding in French without thinking, which is what the naturals tend to do."

Evan appears to be describing a monumental task, one that he and his classmates see as beyond their capabilities, one that only "the naturals" can handle adequately.

This lack of confidence in speaking ability was also evident elsewhere in my classroom observations. In paired speaking activities, the Patrick (single-sex) boys remained almost completely in the target language, whereas the Campbell sample required much more vigilance, as they were prone to ask each other comprehension questions, or to lean over to a classmate for clarification in English. On the surface a lay observer might attribute this to the students not knowing some of the words, but the experienced teacher might interpret it differently: a symptom of a culture that permits students to use English to "bail themselves out." A common strategy that foreign language teachers encourage students to make use of is *circumlocution*; when a word is forgotten or unknown, students should use a synonym or describe the concept to get at it, e.g. *the daughter of my uncle* when he or she has forgotten the word for *cousin*. Student expectations for appropriate classroom behavior for developing these skills were higher in the Patrick class observations, as there was substantially less English spoken between students and the students and teacher. In comparison, the Campbell School students had less of a sense of responsibility for their own learning. As Irwin from the coed Campbell

School observed, his teacher "...moves really quickly [and] will say things in French and not translate them into English. I'm not good with that." One wonders what role Irwin sees himself playing in French class if he is to have all the French neatly translated and presented to him for processing in English.

Willingness to engage in an activity is emblematic of high self-perceptions in ability; conversely, a hesitance thereof is symptomatic of lower self-perceptions. When it concerns adolescents and the activity is something as "high-risk" as expressing oneself in a foreign language before an audience, it seems clearer still. Based primarily on my class observations and corroborated by the interviews, the Patrick school boys engage more willingly in Standard 1.1 behavior which serves to edify their self-perceptions as speakers of French.

Gender Differences

When asked whether girls are generally more verbal than boys, virtually all the Campbell (coed) boys agreed that girls hold an advantage in the verbal skill areas: articulation, reading, writing, and ability in English and foreign languages. They held similar beliefs about boys and math/science in that they felt that boys generally possess more ability in these subjects, although two boys from the coed sample indicated neither gender has any advantage over the other. The Patrick School boys conceded as well that girls held a verbal advantage, with 10 of the 12 agreeing, and with 10 acknowledging an edge to boys in math/science. Boys from both sets were unsure as to whether this difference was due to socio-cultural reasons or brain-based reasons, although they were impressive in their analyses of how these differences evolved, citing such prehistoric

conditions as the hunter/gatherer culture that I discuss in Chapter Two, and providing germane examples of how boys and girls follow different sets of cultural norms, e.g. how boys' playground behavior differs dramatically from girls'.

Establishing the sentiment among both sets of boys that in the four language skills, "girls are definitely better than us" (as Don from the coed Campbell school articulated) is key to determining whether they see school subjects that emphasize the verbal skill as a female domain as a consequence. In other words, given that such a large percentage of the boys concedes that girls may have an advantage (innate or otherwise) in achieving at a high level in the French classroom, they may be prone to naturally lower self-perceptions, since in their view they are swimming against the brain-based or socio-cultural current. However, these lower self-perceptions appear to be more evident in the coed classroom than in the single-sex, for the simple reason that in the single-sex setting, the competing gender is not present. It is far easier to put such thoughts of gender advantages out of mind when said gender is also out of sight. In discussing overall performance by the girls in their class, this is what some of the Campbell (coed) boys had to say:

> Hank: "I just noticed that they're always, you know, kind of on top of their homework, and they're always good at it. And they always participate during class discussions. I noticed that."
>
> Don: "Yeah, they're definitely better. And speaking French, *definitely* better."
>
> Adam: "...because especially in our class the girls are smarter."
>
> Ken: "I don't know, maybe it has something to do genetically that females can pick up a language quicker."
>
> Irwin: "Yeah, they participate a lot more. That could be just because they're smarter in our class."

One wonders then what their general self-perceptions would be in the single-sex environment. Evan, from the Campbell school contributed this:

> "Well, I think that [the single-sex environment] would probably help me to participate more, because [now] a few of the girls who are really good at French will answer questions without raising their hand...you'd actually be more forced to participate, 'cause ...it's easy for someone to just fade out and not participate at all...Another thing to add to that is I think kids who are shy would be – which includes me - would be less discouraged to participate without the girls."

As mentioned above, the Patrick School sample acknowledged that there may be something to female verbal superiority, but their statements reflected less resignation about this condition than the coed boys' did. Instead, they demonstrated a more "matter-of-fact" philosophy, as if to say that although it may be true, it doesn't affect them. When pondering the question of female verbal superiority, these Patrick School boys had this to say:

> Vince: "That definitely has to do with the point of view. I personally think that guys in an all-guy situation are much more talkative. Girls are more talkative in general, but yeah. I'd say Patrick High guys are just as talkative as girls."
>
> Xavier: "Generally girls are a little bit – get better at languages and stuff.
> Researcher: "And how about the converse side, boys and math and science?
> Xavier: "That's true, we're a little bit better at those; Patrick High just got the [state award] for math and sciences."
>
> Rick: "Yeah, I guess. I mean, once again, it depends. But generally I think they are better speakers because they have less things to inhibit them saying whatever they want to say, whereas guys are constantly looking over their shoulder. There's more to lose for guys."

In Vince's comment, it is apparent that he believes the coed environment reinforces the garrulous girl/reticent boy pattern, and that at his school, boys are quite involved verbally and participate more than adequately. Xavier concedes that girls have the verbal advantage, but seems to take pride in his school's math/science achievement, reminding us that the boys at the Patrick School are also quite capable academically. In

Rick's comment, we see a hesitancy to attribute anything to innate reasons, instead suggesting that it may be a result of socio-cultural issues. In these three comments, and in many others throughout the single-sex Patrick School interviews, we get the impression that these boys are not ready to surrender the verbal domain to girls just yet. This I believe is not stubbornness, nor the over-insulation of a single-sex setting at work – it is healthy self-perceptions thriving in a single-sex environment.

Teacher Gender

What effect if any does teacher gender have on the self-perceptions of male students of French? As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, Dee (2006) found that teacher gender was significant in raising student math and reading performances. In addition, Dee found that where one gender improved because of the teacher's gender, the other gender worsened due to opposite gender friction. Since single-sex schools tend to have predominantly same-sex faculty (Finn, 1980), it could be that this factor gives single-sex schools an advantage in developing high performance and high self-perceptions in their students. Moreover, since there is no other gender in the class to provide friction, there is no "loser" in the equation; single-sex education is a win/win situation if one considers Dee's study.

Since my coed sample's teacher was a woman, and my single-sex sample's was a man, this further added appropriateness to this part of my investigation: what were student perceptions of the impact of the gender of the teacher in their overall ability to communicate effectively in French?

Ten of the twelve Patrick School (single-sex) boys claimed that teacher gender was indeed important for their success in the French classroom. Most cited their male teacher as someone who kept learning more relaxed (yet maintained appropriate discipline and class control), was easier to relate to, understood boys' collective learning styles, and diffused traditional gender tension. As Oscar described it, "...they (male teachers) know how we learn and you know, they know how to get the information through to us...so we remember it." Yann added this salient point:

> Yann: "I think in definitely some subjects it's definitely better with male teachers for boys, just because you can relate better to a teacher."
>
> Researcher: "Right. Can you give me an example of one of those subjects where you think it might be better for you – I mean for boys?"
>
> Yann: "Things like history, or even French..."

The coed sample responses leaned more in the opposite direction: eight of the twelve indicated they did not think that boys or girls learned any better with their gender counterparts than with their opposites. A common response among this group was that it was the teacher himself or herself, regardless of gender, who helped them to succeed in any discipline. Other Campbell students echoed the refrain of their Patrick counterparts by suggesting that it was easier to experience rapport with a same-gender teacher, and that this helped their learning. When asked about their French teacher, a woman, and whether she related better to the boys or the girls, two students suggested she might have a better rapport with the girls, and the other ten indicated no evidence of any preference either way.

Modeling in Non-Traditional Subjects

As alluded to above, a high percentage of faculty at all-boys schools are male as well, so it is not unusual that the Patrick School, as a single-sex institution, should follow this trend. What is interesting however is that each of the school's three French teachers are male. This is surprising since according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), over 85% of its French teacher members were female in the 2006-2007 academic year. This may be a contributing factor behind the high sense of success for the students in the Patrick School, ten of whom indicated a preference for male teachers as a means to success in school. These boys may also be benefiting from their teachers in a second and equally powerful fashion: as models in an untraditional academic field. In Chapter Two I discuss at length the issue of perceived boys' domains (advanced math, science, computer science) and girls' domains (English, foreign language, art, music, theater) as playing to natural gender strengths and cemented in place by socio-cultural forces. If girls possess a natural verbal advantage, and writing is seen as a feminine activity, these two obstacles are often sufficient to deter many boys from giving serious thought to achieving in literature or poetry class for example. However Hulse (1997) found that boys in single-sex schools were less likely to buy into the boy domain vs. girl domain, instead seeing both "domains" as one, worthy of earnest effort and achievement. This is due in large part to the absence of girls but also to the presence of male role models in these disciplines. In my conversations with both sets of boys, the topic of male/female domains was not broached directly; nevertheless, as by-products of other questions, some interesting data came to light on the concept of certain activities

being feminine and others masculine. Don of the coed Campbell school cites playground behavior as a way in which genders begin to lean toward one domain or the other:

> "They [boys] express themselves differently, so, like, recess for example, they're playing and the girls are talking or reading. Like, it's so rare to see a guy reading during recess or something like that."

Riordan (1990) claims that both genders consider some activities, reading for example, as "feminine" and therefore feel they run counter to the male "image" that many boys wish to project.

This exchange with Don from the coed Campbell school supports Riordan's assertion:

> Don: "...I think in general you see more girls reading just because a lot of guys try to keep some – maybe macho appearance. They don't want to be caught reading."
>
> Researcher: "Why do you think that is...what do you think of that?"
>
> Don: "I'm not sure. Maybe they're just one of those kids who is just in a group of friends with – or one of those group of friends that are all athletic and stuff, but not especially smart, and they might enjoy reading as a pastime, but they wouldn't want their friends to really know that because it would be frowned upon."
>
> Researcher: "It's outside the role they're playing?"
>
> Don: "Yeah."

The occasional boy who does sit reading during recess or talking with the girls may quickly become labeled for not adapting to this rigid male model. When asked about possible disadvantages to the coed environment for boys, Adam (coed) alludes to the issue of image:

> Adam: "Yeah, and sometimes you don't want to seem like the super smart guy, as silly as that is."
>
> Researcher: "Is it an image thing? Are people worried about their image?"
>
> Adam: "Possibly."

Several students from both schools suggested that French, like reading, has a feminine characteristic to it, which supports Williams, Burden, and Lanvers' (2002) study that found an overall higher level of motivation to learn French among girls than boys. Reasons given by both boys and girls in the study included the widely held perception that French was a feminine language and that it was not considered "cool" for boys to work hard at French. When asked to describe what a typical French class "star" looked like, six of the coed sample boys said it was a girl, three indicated a boy, and three more said it could be either. The Patrick School boys were not asked that question outright, but several wandered on to related issues nonetheless. In discussing the advantages to a single-sex setting, Yann mentions the lack of girls in the classroom as being something that frees male students to achieve in any discipline, but especially French:

> Yann: "I think there might be less embarrassment in physics or science. Just because that's something stereotypically boys are good at, and so it doesn't seem – I don't know. It's not emasculating to, you know, to excel in it."
>
> Researcher: "Whereas French, how would you characterize that?"
>
> Yann; "Well French, you know, you always say communicating is a girl's skill, and you always hear that. And so then you fear like will they see me as – "
>
> Researcher: "...having feminine qualities?"
>
> Yann: "Yeah."

Other boys from the single-sex Patrick school indicated that being too inquisitive in class (i.e. caring enough to achieve in French) was not a problem in their environment. Oscar asserted that he was:

> "...more free to express maybe what I'm thinking, not be afraid to, you know, ask something. You know, maybe not be made fun of by the girls if you, you know, you have a stupid answer."

When asked if Patrick School boys felt more at ease asking for help or wanting to do well in French class, Rick replied:

> "I'd say so, yeah. I'd say that [comfort level] definitely exists. The way that you might not raise your hand as much if there was girls in the room; I think that definitely applies."

This "question-friendly" environment runs counter to the Williams' Burden and Lanvers (2002) findings cited above that boys tended to see achievement as "uncool," due in part to a "lack of male language teachers in schools, causing French in particular to be seen as a female dominated subject..." (Williams et al; p. 508). Their study however was conducted in coed schools where there were fewer male language teacher role-models.

Students from both sample sets made mention of past male teachers as instrumental in setting a tone for high achievement in French. In the single-sex sample, earlier teachers were mentioned numerous times:

> "Last year I had an excellent teacher. I learned so much" (Rick).

> "Mr. L. was a wonderful teacher...I learned quite a lot because of his teaching ways" (Seamus).

Some coed students also weighed in on their past male teacher's effectiveness:

> "Personally, Mr. P. [was] the best French teacher I've had" (Adam).

> "He was a really, really good teacher. I learned a lot from him. He talked French from the beginning...I think Mr. P. gave a good structure and then Miss K. built on it" (George).

In short, the evidence supports the importance of male French teachers as role models for mitigating pressure on boys to under perform. The higher percentage of male teachers in all-boys schools contributes to the overall environment that combats this socio-cultural phenomenon.

Preferences: Coed or Single-Sex?

Boys from both settings were asked outright about their preference: did they prefer their school with or without girls? Putting this question to 24 high school aged boys may not, on the surface, appear to be time well spent, as some would consider the answer obvious; however it did generate some intriguing data. For example, not surprisingly virtually all of the coed sample expressed a preference for coed education, citing reasons such as more opportunities for friendships, good preparation for the "real world" since they'll have to interact with women as adults, and lack of boredom when girls are present. When pressed, several of them acknowledged that single-sex setting did appear to have the advantages of fewer distractions and a more relaxed learning atmosphere, where students could learn freer of those socio-cultural risks mentioned above.

The single-sex sample provided information that contrasted in a curious way with the coed data. Three boys said they preferred their school single-sex, three said they would prefer to have girls, and the remaining six struggled with their answers. The difficulty with this question, as simply stated as it is, is that it requires more clarification. Imagine how responses would vary if we asked a group of people what their favorite music was, and then what their favorite music was while trying to write a doctoral dissertation. The question must be put in the appropriate context in order to have meaning. The six boys who struggled with the question recognized this issue and initiated their own clarification. These were some of the responses to whether they wished they had girls at their school:

> Tris: "Sometimes. I don't think it would have anything to do with the educational aspect of school, just for the socializing."

Xavier: "Some days, yeah, but..."
Researcher: "How come?"
Xavier: "Different scenery."
Researcher: "Something to look at?"
Xavier: "Yeah, exactly, but I..."
Researcher: "Let's just talk about academically."
Xavier: "Probably wouldn't help too much...'cause guys would be checking out the girls the whole time."

Nigel: "Well, yeah, but I think in the sense of learning, no, because it's just another distraction to have, but yeah."
Researcher: "Yeah...so my follow-up [is], 'are these the right reasons?'"
Nigel: "No."

Yann: "In some ways, yes...you know, there's obvious reasons why."
Researcher: " Are those good reasons...to want to have girls in class?"
Yann: "Probably not."

Later on in this chapter we will look further at perceived advantages and disadvantages of each environment and how they relate to students' self-perceptions of adequacy. For now, the issue of how boys in each venue see the role of school environment and education is compelling and bears a closer look.

One striking difference in the attitude of boys in same sex schools versus those in coed schools concerns their attitude toward their schools' role in the type of "education" it should provide. The responses of the single-sex sample pointed for the most part toward the academic model; they recognized that girls would be an intriguing addition to their world, but academically speaking they might upset the focus of class. Their concerns about the distractive element girls would introduce to the class, their improved comfort level without them present, and the challenges of trying to achieve in a perceived "female domain" *with* them present all reflect concerns that would affect their academic performance. Conversely, the Campbell boys were prone to define their education as having more social characteristics. As discussed above, their most common critique of

single-sex as an educational system was that it limited their friendships with girls and it was not good for preparing them socially for the real world, where men and women must co-exist in the workplace and other realms. These are certainly valid concerns, but they are somewhat at odds with the designs of this study which seek to determine a largely academic phenomenon: boys' self-perceptions as communicators in French.

When asked how interesting his coed French class was, Irwin replied, "I guess it's interesting because of the friends I'm with. I can talk to them. The class itself is not very interesting." Irwin's misinterpretation of my question - I certainly was not interested in how comfortable he felt chatting with his neighbors in French class - reflected a "social first" priority that I saw several times in my coed discussions and that I observed in classes. When asked about his comfort level in class, Don had this to say:

> "Well, because I'm a senior in that class, I'm totally comfortable in that class. I'm not nervous about anything or what I'm wearing, what I'm not wearing or - I'm totally comfortable in that class."

Don ties his comfort level to his social status (a senior in a class with mostly sophomores and juniors), not his confidence in his French abilities. In the classroom observations I noticed that Don appeared overly reliant on his neighbors for help with tasks and had little desire to work independently, qualities that are inconsistent with the description he provided in the interview: a good student for whom French came relatively easily.

Still other coed students indirectly suggested that school as a social vehicle and school as an academic forum are not mutually exclusive:

> Adam: "Yeah, in the classes where I have fewer of my friends, I don't participate as much."

> Researcher: "I see, so having your friends as a social safety net makes you feel comfortable and you participate more?"
>
> Adam: "Yeah, and I think you're much more willing to take risks because like if you get a question wrong you're like 'oops' and you turn around and laugh at your friend and move on."

Adam appears to be saying that having a support system of friends in the classroom helps in taking on-task risks. In other words, the social network permits him to ask questions and to be a more active learner. Inherent in this assumption, however, is the belief that the coed environment can be hostile to those who, unlike Adam, are not protected by a convoy of friends in their classes.

Len from the coed sample felt that the social side supported to achievement on the academic side: "Yeah, but I think - I also think that the social part of it leads into the academic part of it, and helps us learn..."

These distinctions were evident in my class observations as well. In the single-sex Patrick classes, there were far fewer "sidebar" conversations and students transitioned much more seamlessly from activity to activity. These boys understood that the *raison d'être* of the class was to improve their language skills, and used the opportunity to practice their oral skills with the teacher and with each other during the paired speaking and group activities. Student ownership of French class as a scholarly environment was manifest. In contrast, the coed Campbell classes were characterized with numerous sidebar conversations almost all of which were in English and many of which were off-task and of a social nature, and transitions from activity to activity were difficult and required strenuous work on the part of the teacher. On more than one occasion I observed a look of mild indignation - such as when the strolling violinist in a restaurant interrupts an intimate conversation at a corner table - as the Campbell teacher tried to bring students

back on task. Those students that were willing to use class for building their skills were cognizant of this off-task behavior and were distracted by it and more likely to join in the longer it lasted. In essence, the Campbell students used French class for building a wider range of skills; some academic, but some social as well.

The issue of differing views of the role of schooling based on single-sex versus coed environment is fascinating and one that I believe merits further study. Certainly when it concerns student self-perception of efficacy in speaking French, a classroom that provides a safe environment for practicing and developing that skill is a necessary requirement. Based on the data obtained, the environment that more effectively encourages mastery of the Standard 1.1 skills, skills that are strictly speaking academic ones, is the single-sex setting.

Advantages/Disadvantages to Coed/Single-Sex

Each sample set was asked about their perceived advantages and disadvantages to their own environment and to that of their counterparts. For the most part, many of the same beliefs were shared by students of both settings, who were generally able to offer sound analyses with solid support. Below is a summary of those findings.

General Advantages: Coed

Several Campbell and Patrick School boys mentioned competition as an advantage to having girls in class with them. In most cases, they depicted a healthy rivalry where the girls would motivate them to strive harder to keep up with and perhaps even surpass the girls' rapid pace:

> Hank (coed): "Well, maybe if she's a diligent student and she always does her homework, and you know maybe you like her, then you might start doing your homework because you want to, you know, stay up with her, and you want kind of to be at the same level."
>
> This sentiment was similarly echoed by Oscar (single-sex):
>
> "...'cause I'm a competitive person, so if maybe there was a female in the class that was really good at French and sort of like taking - raising their hand and taking the questions away from me, as some kids do to you, you know, I tend to raise my hand more to out-compete them, yeah, just so I can get more - talk more in class, 'cause I have like a certain standard of how much I have to talk in class, you know."
>
> Other students suggested that girls "really help propel the class forward" (George/coed) and otherwise help to motivate the boys.

Three Campbell boys and one Patrick boy indicated that the coed French class is beneficial because it exposes each gender to the other's natural voice, tone, and inflection. A French class that uses exclusively male voices is not adequately preparing students for travel into the field, where they would encounter French women and an unfamiliar way of speaking. Chuck from the Campbell school says, "...'cause if you ever were to go to France, I mean, you can't just know how a male speaks French; you have to know how a female speaks French."

Some boys also felt that girls brought a unique perspective of opinion, learning style, and mode of self-expression that would be lacking in the single-sex setting. George (coed) indicated a gratitude for what girls bring to the class, describing one girl in particular as "...one of those ones that really would make school different because she really is passionate about what she thinks."

There was some divergence of opinion on two questions, namely class behavior on the part of boys and the amount and tone of teasing or razzing to which boys subject

one another. The teacher's classroom control and careful monitoring of teasing or "razzing" (as I will refer to it) are essential in the cultivation of healthy self-perceptions in speaking any foreign language, because of the previously mentioned risks involved in an adolescent attempting to express himself. This is risky business. The product of the effort is on display for all to hear and pass judgment on, often behind the teachers back, or worse yet, in front of him/her and in full view and earshot of the rest of the class. Some of the coed boys felt that girls served as an emollient in keeping boys' boisterousness in check. Two coed boys mentioned "more goofing off" or "troublemaking" as a distinct possibility in the single-sex environment:

> Evan: "...and I think there would be a lot more - this is a stereotype - but I think there would be a lot more troublemaking going on and such, 'cause boys need to figure out how to entertain themselves..."
>
> Irwin: "I guess if I was in an all-boys school I might be inclined to talk a bit more like, not on topic. I might goof off a bit more. Maybe."

The related issue of "razzing" was defined for the students as teasing that evolves after a student's performance in the communicative skill before the class, for example, standing up and reading a passage in French. Students from both samples were quite familiar with these circumstances, many of whom displayed a wry smile when I set the scene: "the teacher asks you to stand and read a section from a dialogue...do your friends subtly whisper anything to you as you finish and sit down?" Every student from both samples without exception acknowledged that razzing existed in the classroom, that it was generally harmless - even supportive in an ironic way, but that it *could* overstep the boundaries of acceptability. Negative razzing would indeed have a corresponding negative effect on student self-perceptions as students would be much more hesitant to use the language in class, lest they incur public peer disapproval. Adam from the coed

sample felt that "...it might get a bit harsher..." in the single-sex setting, and Ben agreed, indicating "It might be a little bit...it could turn a bit more negative maybe." I will return to the issue of razzing later on in this chapter, as most boys from both samples felt that the single-sex environment would have a different effect than that which Adam and Ben describe.

General Advantages: Single-Sex

By and large the single-sex boys saw their environment as having fewer distractions, being more risk-friendly, providing a more relaxed atmosphere in which to learn, and being easier on their teachers. Numerous boys described how they were able to "be themselves" in their classroom and not worry about impressing the girls. When asked about the single-sex class atmosphere, Yann said,

> "Like we worry about what our answer is going to be less, like we're less worried about if it's going to be silly or it's not going to make sense. We might speak our mind more..."

Xavier added a similar sentiment when stating that, "It's a bit more relaxed, relaxed with all the guys, like you don't feel you have to put yourself out there or it's not as - you're not going to be as embarrassed if you screw up the answer."

It is important to point out that a relaxed and confident sense of self is one of the most essential pre-conditions to improving in the communicative skill and raising one's self-perceptions. If the student is burdened with the typical socio-cultural millstones that accompany conventional teen angst (e.g. "When I try to speak French with an authentic accent, I really sound like a sissy"), his self-consciousness will become heightened, he will be less willing to venture forth with the language, and his improvement in Standard

1.1 skills will lag. Inevitably, his self-perceptions will falter as a consequence. Over the course of my discussions with both sets of boys, I found them describing the single-sex setting as a safe haven of sorts for developing as a French student. Wynn (single-sex) asserted that if there were girls in his French class,

> "...personally I would think twice about what I would say; I probably wouldn't participate as much. I would have to really think about what I'm saying and say 'I know I'm 100% right on it,' otherwise I probably would hesitate and probably just leave my hand down."

Seamus (single-sex) added,

> "...it still [is relevant] with all the guys, too. You still don't want to feel stupid among them. But it's less [relevant] with all guys than it is when you have girls there. Because when you have girls there, the first thing that comes to mind is, 'If I answer this wrong...I'm going to look bad.'"

As mentioned above, many of the coed boys recognized the single-sex classroom advantage in developing a willingness to speak the language:

> Ben: "Actually I think it would benefit my speaking skills."
>
> Researcher: "How so?
>
> Ben: "Well, I think I'd naturally participate more and get more practice. Because I guess I'd feel more comfortable in a classroom with all guys."

When asked how a single-sex classroom might help his confidence level in speaking the language, Ken, a coed student replied:

> Ken: "Yeah, like you try a more elaborate accent than you would here so as to not - because you would maybe embarrass yourself here."
>
> Researcher: "Do you get teased here if you use "L'accent francais?"
>
> Ken: "Yeah, you may get, like think that you're kind of weird, whereas in a single-sex it's just - I don't know, natural to try a stronger accent..."

Several Patrick students talk about their environment as being more risk-friendly than the coed setting. Unser says, "I don't think I'm as unwilling to try new things. I think

I'm a little bit more self-confident in my answers. I don't second guess myself as much..." In a similar fashion, Peter claims that the single-sex setting is more conducive to taking an on-task risk like volunteering to recite a poem in French aloud, adding that with girls present, "...I wouldn't want to get it wrong in front of them...so I wouldn't take the risk."

When asked to consider which environment is better for his self-perceptions as a speaker of French, George from the coed Campbell School mentions the more risk-friendly single-sex setting: "With one gender, you can feel more comfortable with the people around you and take more risks to go further."

I reiterate that it is this willingness to take a risk that is so crucial in improving one's speaking abilities in a foreign language. As concerns the focus of this study, which is measuring student self-perceptions as effective speakers of French, providing an environment where this risk-taking quality can be fostered and nurtured so that students can improve as speakers is a priority that may be undermined where both genders are present. I refer again to Lawrie and Brown (1992) who found that the presence of both sexes in the secondary classroom brings added salience to the gender differences, thereby reinforcing those differences and narrowing the scope of what is appropriate male and female behavior.

Boys from both settings in general agree that the presence of girls in the classroom can be a distraction. The coed boys were particularly descriptive in their explanations of what forms these distractions took. Physical attraction, flirtation, and immature behavior (grandstanding) to gain someone's attention, are far more prevalent in the coed environment according to both sample sets. When asked about disadvantages to having girls in French class, some of the coed boys responded as follows:

George: "I think maybe showing off. At least in the past classes that I've had, there's been a lot of flirtation going on and I think that could take away from the class."

Chuck: "Well, people speak out a lot. There's not much class discipline. It seems like a trend in all the French classes."

Jamie: "I do believe that the [single-sex] class would have learned more because they would have been more focused [because of] fewer distractions and you can just get more work done."

Virtually all of the coed boys saw some level of distraction inherent in their environment, yet as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, these same boys almost to a person defend the coeducational school as the superior educational format. How do they reconcile this? How can one classroom rife with distractions be a better learning environment than another? I believe it comes down to the coed students' concept that education should have more social than academic characteristics. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, many of the coed boys refer to coeducation as better preparation for the real world in that it provides experience in developing and sustaining relationships with those girls who will be working alongside them several years hence. The Patrick School boys on the other hand appear to envision school as content and curriculum driven, where skills are mastered and scholarship obtained. It could be that the coed boys are willing to concede academic pursuits, which they perceive as secondary in importance, to the single-sex environment while they fix their attention on refining their interrelating skills. This question, fascinating as it is, will not be pursued further in this chapter but will figure in Chapter Five under "Discussion of Findings" and "Implications for Further Research."

The Patrick School sample conveyed similar sentiments regarding the distracting element of coeducation. Seamus felt that without the distraction of girls, "You stay more

focused...if there's no girls in class, what are you going to lose focus for?" When asked to consider the distractive element in coed versus single-sex, Tris said:

> "The class is a little bit focused now that it's all boys, so I think it's probably faster. Obviously, if you're thinking about talking to your friends, there's a motivation to talk to a girl."

Students from both settings saw an advantage to the teacher in the single-sex environment for both social and pedagogical reasons;

> Tris (single-sex): "I think it would be easier for the teacher not because of any different mental capacity, just that they don't have to worry about...differences in gender."
>
> Researcher: "They don't have to worry about sensitivities?"
>
> Tris: "Yeah, ...or learning styles. Girls probably have a slightly different learning style than males coming from different backgrounds over history. Obviously, it would be easier for the teacher because he wouldn't have to try to incorporate multiple learning styles, just one."

Oscar felt that the teachers at his single-sex school, most of whom are male, would have a more difficult time were girls to be introduced into the class:

> Researcher: "...that's interesting what you said about maybe if you were to introduce girls it would be kind of tough on teachers."
>
> Oscar: "Yeah...'cause they would have to, I don't know, adjust their attitudes and you know, change their whole teaching style maybe."

Adam from the coed Campbell school touches upon the challenge for teachers teaching to two genders as well when he mentions how teachers in coed schools "...have to be careful with projects...a clothes unit, shopping at the mall...and it goes both ways; we could do one [unit] on car racing." In other words, teachers must be aware of gender tendencies and not over-teach to one at the exclusion of the other, as a female French teacher who might ask students to do projects on fashion, Romantic Era poetry, and French food, three fields that are thought to appeal more to girls.

Both sets of boys were asked outright if they felt girls in the class enhanced learning or impeded it. Eight of the single-sex boys claimed that girls would be an impediment to learning, mostly due to their mere presence as a distraction. As a rule, when boys of either environment referred to girls as distracting, they seemed to imply that this was through no fault of their own - their presence imposed a mode of deportment on the part of boys that would infringe on the learning atmosphere: boys trying to impress with off-task behavior, girls being "something to look at" as coed student Irwin admitted, or girls heightening boys' self-consciousness when the latter is asked to engage in some on-task risk such as reading aloud or asking questions in French. Three Patrick boys felt that there would be no impact either way were their classroom coed, and one felt that adding girls would enhance learning. This boy, Peter, felt that girls "...would enhance [the class]. I learn more not by pounding it in, but just talking about stuff in class...so they might get us off on different tangents that we learn more about French culture and stuff like that."

Some Patrick boys mentioned their single-sex environment as being more accepting of intellectual pursuits, citing the danger of appearing "too smart," or the general disapproval of participating fully in class or in certain academic clubs or activities in a coed setting. Quentin had this to say:

> "I remember one time last year that I was going to a math meet. I saw...somebody I knew in the hall and they actually wished me good luck at the math meet. Like that thing never would've happened at my old [coed] school."

When asked how girls might change the atmosphere of his current class, Yann indicated the following:

> I think it might be harder to get a response out of us, like, because again of that fear that we'll look too smart. So we're probably not going to raise our hand as

much, and even when called on might play dumb or something and not try - if it's really hard, we might not try to look like we know everything."

There is a certain poignancy to these two descriptions of an environment that allows boys to pursue academic endeavors free of negative attention or ridicule. Xavier (single-sex) describes the "image" element of coeducation as abetting this anti-intellectual attitude when he asserts the following:

Xavier: "...yeah, [in the coed setting, you] gotta act cool, so [you] won't answer the questions,..."

Researcher: "...I think I heard sort of sarcasm in your voice that deep down you don't really believe it, but maybe it's true, that sort of 'guy's' image?"

Xavier: "Yeah, like you gotta get the image out that you're cool in front of the girls."

Researcher: "And so what is part of being cool?"

Xavier: "...guys think they're cool when they're rebels and stuff, I think.

Researcher: "...they're not interested in achieving academically?"

Xavier: "Yeah, I think that's what you see in public schools and stuff."

The coed boys' responses on the topic of whether the presence of girls enhanced or impeded learning were more normally distributed, with five students recognizing that the single-sex classroom would make for an improved learning atmosphere, four remaining non-committal, and three indicating the single-sex setting would impede learning. Common descriptors of this new environment from the coed sample were "more focused," "more participation," and "fewer distractions." In an acknowledgment that girls tended to emphasize verbal skills in class more than boys, several of the boys indicated that the absence of girls would compel boys to fill in the vacuum:

Evan: "...I think everybody would be forced to participate a lot more, because most of the participation in our class comes from the female part, and most of the

> positive participation...I think without girls in the class, I would probably end up participating more..."

Certainly a more focused effort on the part of the boys in tandem with fewer distractions would contribute to higher self-perceptions of efficacy as a speaker, but it is this issue of increased participation that is particularly germane because it is through regular oral practice that we improve both our skill level and how effective we see ourselves as communicators. Frank felt that in the single-sex setting, boys "...might be more familiar with people that are their own gender, so they wouldn't be afraid to speak up or to participate as much as they can." This willingness to participate more, when experienced in the more "relaxed" landscape of the single-sex setting where "you can be yourself", makes for enhanced communicative skills, because boys are not overly concerned with making mistakes, achieving in a traditionally female domain, or adhering to a particular image. They can instead concentrate on developing as speakers of French.

Two of the three coed boys who believed their environment was superior to the single-sex setting for learning cited girls as the chief reason. Since girls participate more than boys, removing them would have a general dampening effect on the pace and breadth of the material covered.

> Don: "...they're [the girls] the ones that actually get the class going and stuff 'cause they participate more than us, and they - yeah, in my class for sure they-
>
> Researcher: "Set the standard?"
>
> Don: "Yes. Yes, they definitely do. They always raise their hand, they always want to read, they always want to do stuff, and we're just, like, sitting back."

One wonders if Don misinterprets my question, as he describes a class where there is learning taking place but which appears to leave him and the other boys on the sidelines "sitting back," apart from any meaningful improvement. As I observed Don in

class, he did indeed do a lot of "sitting back" and allowing the girls (and some boys) to carry the class, so it is difficult to embrace his theory that his current setting suits his learning needs better. At one point in class, Don was chatting with a classmate as the teacher delivered instructions. When the time came to begin the activity, he asked aloud in English what the task entailed. When his request was ignored, he shook his head in annoyance and solicited a classmate. Overly dependent on neighbors to help him with his work, rarely initiating an interaction in the target language, yet comfortable in this situation, Don claims to prefer the coed setting because he feels the vacuum created by the lack of girls in the single-sex environment would not be filled by the boys' increased efforts. His actions however bespeak a preference due to lower expectations and a lack of any significant dedication to individual and collective improvement.

Ben, the third boy from the coed Campbell school who saw advantages to coeducation felt that girls brought an essential balance to the class which not only kept the class well grounded but substantially aided the female teacher.

Finally, those coed students who felt there would be no change in the level of learning came forth with a variety of reasons. Their sense was that with no girls left to impress, their efforts would suffer and the class would get rowdier and involve more risqué jokes; however this would be offset by fewer distractions in class, and the belief that eventually the boys would accept the onus of propelling the class forward.

Self-Perceptions as Speakers

Students at both venues were asked to discuss the two environments in terms of how each contributes to the development of students' verbal skills. Since all of the Patrick

School sample had experienced coed schooling at the middle school level, they were asked to compare the two and conclude which in their opinion contributed to students' higher perceptions of themselves as speakers of French. Since all but two of the coed boys had never experienced a single-sex environment, the question was phrased somewhat differently: How did they believe the single-sex environment would benefit and/or hurt their self-perceptions as speakers of French?

Nine of the twelve Patrick boys indicated that their single-sex environment was superior for many of the same reasons previously discussed: a more relaxed atmosphere that lent itself to on-task "risk-taking" such as speaking, less self-consciousness, fewer distractions, etc., with the remaining three asserting that being exposed to the female voice in French together with girls' excellent verbal and participation skills were important enough to warrant their presence in the classroom. There was a general acknowledgement by the Patrick boys of a weakened state (if not an absence) in the all-boys environment of those elements that plague many of us even as adults when we are placed "front and center" before an audience: heightened self-consciousness, anxiety, reticence, etc. Moreover, they understood that such conditions were harmful to developing the verbal skill and subsequent high self-perceptions as speakers of French.

Yann opined that his communicative needs were better served in his single-sex environment, because

> "Well, like I said, my past [coed] experience was bad. You know, I really didn't talk, and most of the boys didn't talk the entire class. And just that distraction and the unwillingness to speak up, which is a lot of the point of French class is learning how to speak..."

Yann understands that there exists a connection between oral practice and oral proficiency, and asserts that his current French class environment is more conducive to

such practice. When asked how the coed setting might affect his and his classmates' willingness to speak French in class, Unser agreed:

> "That would probably be the most affected sector of the class if there were to be girls in it. I think the confidence level is the most essential part of speaking up in a class like French where you're not always sure, because the thing about French is you're never positive because it's not your mother tongue."

Peter suggests the possibility of channeling his self-consciousness into a positive force in a coed environment believing he would be motivated by the desire not to embarrass himself in front of the girls. As a result, he might study harder and be better prepared for class. However, he maintains that the single-sex setting is better for his self-perceptions as a communicator in French because an environment free of angst is more favorable to a level of self-confidence that promotes healthy self-perceptions. Wynn, one of the three boys who initially judged the coed setting to be better for self-perceptions, expresses similar ambivalence when he claims that girls would cause boys to "raise the level of their game" so to speak; however, "...in terms of just getting up and speaking...that's where the male environment definitely helps."

Certainly subversive in maintaining healthy self-perceptions as a speaker of any foreign language is the environment that the student perceives as unfriendly to his risk-taking. An essential part of teacher training in any discipline is how to correct oral participation in a compassionate manner, yet this is particularly true in the modern foreign language classroom where the student relies so heavily on oral participation as a means to improve. The issue has been cited above various times but again is germane here because it is so integrally tied to self-perceptions of efficacy: students who feel comfortable enough to consistently risk volunteering and participating in French do so out of healthy perceptions of themselves as speakers. Simply stated, they feel up to the

task, confident that they can succeed, and are only moderately deterred when they suffer setbacks. Unser describes his single-sex French class as comfortable and forgiving when errors are committed because "You can't expect everyone to just naturally get it, or be good at it." Quentin describes the hypothetical coed influence on his single-sex class as risk-stifling; inhibiting his participation lest he be wrong and sternly judged, and imposing a general hesitation to participate on the class as a whole, where the boys would "wait it out longer" before volunteering to speak.

The coed boys cited many of the same issues when comparing their environment to the single-sex setting. As mentioned above, the phrasing of the question for these boys tended to elicit a bifurcated, two-part response, i.e. the advantages and disadvantages of the single-sex experience on their self-perceptions. Therefore, it was harder to come away with clear preferences from these students. Nevertheless, eight boys saw some advantages to the single-sex environment in terms of how it contributes to higher self-perceptions as speakers of French, two saw no advantages, and two saw no measurable difference. Six boys saw some advantages to the coed environment, with four perceiving no such advantages, and the same two seeing no difference. Those boys who saw benefits in single-sex environments mentioned more willingness to speak French, a risk-friendlier atmosphere, improved confidence, and overall comfort as factors in enhancing their self-perceptions in that setting. Those who claimed an edge for the coed milieu felt that exposure to the female voice and a more competitive atmosphere (gender versus gender), would factor into a more enriched backdrop for their self-perceptions.

Hank was one of the boys who saw value in both environments, asserting that the single-sex setting is better for experimenting with the language:

> "...in my old [single-sex] school, I would always speak French, just because, you know, I was good at it, and here I'm a little more conservative about it...at my old school [it] didn't matter if you screwed up."

Whereas the coed environment provides a healthy competition:

> "...if she's a diligent student and she always does her homework, and you know maybe you like her, then you might start doing your homework because you want to, you know, stay up with her, and you want to kind of be at the same level as [her]."

George felt similarly that in single-sex he would "...kind of feel more comfortable and take more risks...to go further...," but that the lack of "...gender competition of speaking...might inhibit the intensity of the class maybe."

When we consider the conditions that lend themselves to improved self-perceptions as speakers of French, we see a pattern whereby those qualities are ascribed by the boys to the single-sex setting: risk-friendlier, higher comfort level, increased participation, and augmented confidence. Conversely, those traits assigned as advantages to the coed system, such as gender competition and the exposure to the female voice, do not overtly indicate any such relevance to enhanced self-perceptions as speakers of French. We have heard boys from both schools talk about being more reticent in the presence of girls, a claim that runs counter to the concept that girls and boys engage in a healthy competition which improves boys' self-perceptions. However, one must ask, is any competition that is based on gender healthy? For the final outcome must be an effort to prove that one gender is superior to the other. In Hank's quote above, he implies that an attractive girl might spur him on to better performance in French and that he would use this social stimulus to motivate himself in the academic arena; but in any competition there is a loser. Perhaps most of the boys in both samples subconsciously recognize that

their best avenue to success in developing Standard 1.1 skills is through cooperative channels rather than competitive ones.

The second trait, that of the female's unique voice, pitch, and inflection may be a red herring, a mountain conjured up from a molehill to support a preference for the coed environment. The question of gaining familiarity with the French-speaking female voice as an advantage to the coed setting is overstated: French females, like females everywhere, do indeed speak with a higher pitch than males, but they do so in the same language. Regional and country-based variations in French accent and pronunciation are much more likely to cause comprehension issues than the higher pitched voices of half the population, yet that concern eluded these same boys.

Classroom "Razzing"

Earlier in this chapter the issue of teasing or "razzing" was broached as a classroom condition which may impede healthy self-perceptions of efficacy in speaking French. If students know that whenever they participate orally they may be subject to teasing, they could be less likely to contribute at the next opportunity. The question then is how do the two environments vary in the amount and tone of razzing and what are the effects.

For both samples, the question posed was whether there was any razzing, whether the high achieving males in the class had to tolerate any negative razzing, and what effect the presence or lack thereof of girls had or would have on the razzing. All students from both schools acknowledged that razzing or teasing for engaging in some communicative activity aloud before the class was commonplace. Some students implied that it was an

ironic form of support for fellow students that in most cases was done without malice. Most students from both milieus understood that when razzing turns negative, it can have a latent and adverse effect on the student's self-perceptions as a speaker, since he or she may be reluctant to venture forth with the language again. However, most students felt that the razzing seldom was destructive in nature. What was surprising was that a significant number of boys from both settings believed that the coed environment would cause or causes the razzing to sharpen in tone, to go from innocuous or constructive even to destructive. Ten of the twelve Patrick High School students felt that the addition of girls would have a detrimental effect on the razzing, one felt it would improve the tone, and one believed there would be no difference. Although the interview protocols did not include a question on the effects of negative razzing, many boys came to the topic on their own and conjectured that such negative input would have a dampening effect on participation and risk-taking as a whole. Perhaps this is the driving force behind why so many of the single-sex boys find their environment superior for taking on-task risks: it is more forgiving when their language production is not up to par. Negative reinforcement for risk-taking such as participation in a French class can understandably have very serious consequences on how the male French student sees himself as a speaker of French. Wynn describes the razzing in his single-sex French class as a generally positive element of the class:

> "...I mean it's generally accepted too; I mean it's all pretty much done in good fun...inside of class we can all kinda have that general bond so if somebody says something we can all kinda laugh at it."

Nigel makes reference to his school's culture as setting a tone wherein students feel protected for having high academic aspirations to the point where classroom razzing

is easily understood in a supportive context. When asked if the high achievers in his class were made to feel either isolated or encouraged for their enthusiasm, he claimed:

> "Well, I think that the teachers and just about everyone at this school especially, they encourage you to do well, so I'd say that yeah, they're pretty much encouraged...I think that good-natured teasing...it's all in good fun."

One of those high achievers is Quentin, a boy I noticed almost immediately in my class observations as a very active and engaged student, more than capable, and very invested in his own learning. He mentioned a more forgiving atmosphere for students when they risked and lost, saying that "You don't get the vultures jumping on you..." and depicted this blunt characterization of the coed learning environment:

> "[It] probably amplifies the malicious [razzing]...because we're trying to impress [the girls], or trying to get dates, or you're trying to like - so it's kind of like natural selection...look at me; I'm stronger then he is...I'm smarter than he is."

The consensus among the boys who felt that razzing would be less supportive in the coed environment was that the need to impress the girls with sharp wit, disdain for French, and a survival of the fittest mentality would overwhelm their best academic intentions. Yann acknowledged that the razzing, "...might escalate more to the negative, because when girls are there it's sort of a temptation to make yourself look better by making comparisons to other people."

These beliefs runs counter to much of the conventional thinking that the presence of girls in schools has a soothing effect on boys, supporting instead Lawrie and Brown's (1992) findings, cited in Chapter Two, that the presence of both genders in a classroom setting reinforces these gender differences. Dumais (2002) found that during the secondary years, males develop a rigid belief system of what the gender boundaries are and feel very strongly about maintaining them, and as discussed in Chapter Two, high

achievement in French may be outside those boundaries. However, according to Hulse (1997), single-sex schools engender boys who are more open to a wider definition of masculinity and therefore less constrained to follow the rigid model of what a young man should and should not do.

On the coed side of this question, the distribution was more balanced. Three boys felt that the single-sex environment would sharpen the razzing and make it more destructive, three believed that it would soften the razzing, and six saw no difference between the two settings in this regard. Most of these boys understood that negative razzing could have a detrimental effect on participation and, as a consequence, healthy self-perceptions, although like their single-sex counterparts felt that negative razzing was rare. The two boys that had previously attended a single-sex school believed that there would be some additional razzing, but that it would be no more negative than in a coed school.

Those Campbell School boys who saw the razzing sharpening in tone in the single-sex setting were not so firm in their convictions as were their Patrick School counterparts who made the inverse claim. This is understandable, as none of the three had ever studied in that environment and, as such, were engaging in speculation. Ben stated that "It [the razzing in single-sex] might be a little bit...it could turn a bit more negative maybe. Yeah, I think it could get a little more malicious." Nigel allowed that the razzing "...might get a bit harsher, yeah...", and Len suggested that in a coed setting, "Maybe they're less likely to do that [razz negatively]." The use of such modals as "might" and "maybe" denote an uncertainty on the part of the boys as they ponder this hypothetical situation. Frank's speculation showed interesting progression as he initially believed the

single-sex environment would foster more negative feedback from classmates, then pondering the issue for a quiet moment, had this to say:

> "Of course, now that I think about it, there could be a situation where there would be more [negative razzing] if the girls were there because people would want to impress them or something like that - to be funny or what have you."

In general, razzing is seen by both sample sets as a neutral to positive element of class, a way to show solidarity and support for one another in an oddly ironic way; after all, boys tend to tease in a good-natured way only those they care about. Nevertheless, once the razzing turns negative for whatever reason, be it an attempt to curry favor with the girls in the class or out of genuine scorn for another, it can have serious repercussions. It can poison the classroom atmosphere and hamper student attempts to develop the most public of skills - the oral skill.

The Other Environment

In order to persuade boys to consider the pros and cons of each environment and its effect on their self-perceptions in the speaking skill, the hypothetical scenario of the "other environment" had to be set before them. In neither case was establishing these conditions easy, as the boys were naturally influenced by their actual setting, and asking them to consider a class with girls or without them ignores the dynamic that is already established in each class. The single-sex school boys were asked to consider what short and long-term effects would result from their class if ten new female exchange students were to attend for the rest of the year. Since the coed boys were already familiar with girls as classmates, they were asked to consider whether they would be more or less comfortable reciting a French poem aloud without girls present.

"Initial shock," "nervousness," and "Wow, there are girls here," were some of the more common sentiments expressed by the single-sex boys on day one of the girls' arrival in the hypothetical scenario they were provided. All twelve Patrick School boys indicated there would be a severe loss of focus at first (completely normal and understandable given the situation), followed by some partial return to normalcy. Eight of the boys felt that the class dynamic would be forever altered, while the other four expected it would eventually return to normal. When we consider the discussion above on the differences and overall advantages to the single-sex environment, much of which is asserted by the single-sex sample, one wonders what this normalcy would resemble: normal for single-sex, or normal for coed? Would the Patrick boys, after a period of adjustment, now begin to have second thoughts about participating where they had none before? Would they emerge from this initial shock to begin sharply razzing each other as they perceive their coed counterparts normally do? Would this return to normalcy then bear the characteristics of the single-sex or the coed realm?

Yann described the altered class dynamic as follows:

> Yann:"I think the boys might be more subdued...They're probably going to be more concerned with the girls than with the subject at hand...It would definitely be a distraction."
>
> Researcher:"How long would this distraction last? Would it go away completely after a month or so, or what do you think?"
>
> Yann:"Some of it might, but I think there's always going to be that [distraction].

Seven of the coed boys felt that there would be no difference in their willingness to read a French poem out loud in class in the hypothetical single-sex milieu, four claimed they would feel more comfortable, and one believed he would feel less

comfortable. Evan anticipated, "...no difference, because I would end up probably just looking at the back wall while I read and not paying attention to those around me."

Whereas a student's willingness to recite a French poem out loud before the class might reflect confidence in his own pronunciation and accent, it is not a reflection of his mastery of Standard 1.1, which requires that he take part in conversation, exchange opinions, and express feelings and emotions. For this reason, both sample sets were asked which setting they felt lent itself more to promoting these skills using the following scenario: your turn to provide information, express feelings/emotions, or provide an opinion is imminent in class - would you feel more or less self-conscious with or without girls present? Eight of the twelve boys in the coed setting acknowledged that the presence of girls amplifies their sense of anxiety as their turn to speak approaches, and the remaining four indicated it would make no difference. I would add that one of these four, Irwin, who consistently implied over the course of his interview that he was impervious to any influence from his female classmates, was the one boy who I found during the classroom observations to be highly susceptible to distraction in the presence of girls, displaying ample off-task behavior and reluctance to use French in class. He acknowledged that sharing deep thoughts on a poem for example might be difficult for most boys, but would not be for him. Ben indicated that he would feel, "...probably less anxious if girls weren't in the room because...I'd be nervous about what they'd think of me if I expressed my feelings at that level of depth." Don favored the single-sex environment,

> "Because I guess guys just are more reluctant to opening up in front of girls and stuff instead of just guys only...opening up about, like, what they think about the reading, what their feelings are, opinions."

All twelve of the Patrick School boys agreed that in this situation the presence of girls would raise the level of anxiety to varying degrees. Xavier described how in his single-sex environment he can "put a funny spin on" his answer to settle his anxiety, but that in a coed setting, as his turn to speak would approach, he would get progressively more nervous and end up "beet red" as he succinctly phrased it. Yann asserted that his oral contribution in coed settings would be considerably shorter, saying, "you might be inclined not to talk as much..." for fear of being seen as overly sensitive or caring too much about French. This observation gets to the heart of the matter because the atmosphere that causes the student to suppress oral practice in foreign language will always discourage the building of healthy self-perceptions, since it does not encourage practice and improvement through trial and error. Yann went on to summarize the issue in this way:

> "You know, guys aren't supposed to express their feelings, which in order to comment on that you kind of have to, and that's just sort of an embarrassing thing to talk about around a bunch of girls and with guys mixed in and stuff."

The scenarios set forth above, namely an infusion of ten girls into the single-sex class, reciting a French poem out loud before the class, and one's imminent turn to express feelings or opinion in French were all conceived to persuade boys to consider what life in French class is like for their peers in the other sample and how it would affect their performance in French. Based on the evidence, a significant majority of students indicated a preference for the single-sex setting in terms of building up a skill set that leads to compliance with the requirements of Standard 1.1.

Pride in Performance

How might one determine how important achievement is to students, and whether the presence of the other gender affects it? In order to ascertain whether boys felt more self-conscious about their performance and how it is assessed in the coed setting, the boys from both milieus were asked the following questions: How do you feel when a teacher hands back a test that you know you did poorly on? Would you feel the same, worse, or better with/without girls in the room? The scenario was the return of a test with the grade facing up - would the student be more inclined to quickly conceal the grade in his current setting or in the other? The thought behind this admittedly convoluted and arcane scenario is that the male student who is particularly sensitive to the presence of girls bearing witness to his vulnerabilities might feel more at ease being assessed in an environment without them. The return of a test is but one example of evaluative feedback for, as we know, a single class is replete with dozens of mini-assessments. Teachers correct pronunciation, grammar, and style, sometimes putting the student on the spot and other times waiting for a break in the action to correct them. How teachers assess students is one of the factors that make up a class's atmosphere and establish its comfort level. This example of the hand-back of the test seemed to resonate with the boys who were able to relate to the heightened sensitivity of the situation.

Ten of the twelve Patrick School boys indicated they would be more intent on hiding the bad grade from their hypothetical female classmates. Their reasons ranged from not wanting to seem stupid to not wanting to lose out to them in a competitive situation. Peter mentioned image as the key factor, suggesting that he has an image as a good student and would like to keep it that way, "But if it's someone with like - that's

notorious like the jocks, and they don't care about getting bad grades, they would probably want to show it off. I definitely see that." Oscar indicated that since he was a good student, his poor performance would be rare enough where he would not hesitate to allow girls to see the grade.

The coed sample had seven boys who would be more likely to hide the grade, and five for whom it wouldn't matter. They too mentioned image as justification for hiding the grade. Jamie said,

> "I would be more ashamed of the grade if girls were present because, first of all, everybody wants to have a good image, you're smart and stuff. Also sometimes some of [the girls] go 'whoa' or something, whereas a guy would go 'ah, we all get F's...' You'll get a little more understanding for it than a girl will give you."

Several of the boys who indicated no preference felt that their overriding emotion would be embarrassment with or without girls. They felt they would be no more inclined to hide the grade in the coed setting than they would in the single-sex. As Chuck claimed, "I'd just be...disappointed in myself."

As alluded to earlier, the environment that can limit the extent to which sensitivities thwart a student's experimentation with the language will engender his higher self-esteem, for as he feels more comfortable with his surroundings, he will venture forth in the language, make mistakes, learn from them, and improve. How teachers give feedback on assessments plays a role in developing a healthy environment for such experimentation. Since most boys from both samples felt the single-sex environment was more protective of their sensitivities, it follows that their comfort levels would follow suit.

Class Comfort Level

Students were asked about their comfort levels in their current French classes to gain an understanding of how it affected their language output. Eight coed students asserted they felt comfortable in French class, with three suggesting a lower than normal level, and one indicating an average comfort level. The single-sex sample had similar results, with seven boys indicating a high comfort level, three lower than normal, and two suggesting a normal level of comfort in French class. For the most part, the "high comfort level" coed responses reflected healthy self-perceptions. Hank of the Campbell School indicated a confidence with the language that stemmed from having been well prepared and knowing he was capable. Other coed responses seemed tied to the theory cited above that these same boys saw education more as a social construct than academic, as they discussed their comfort level in such terms as being older than most of the students in the class, or satisfaction with their peer group or clique image. There is Don's interesting quote previously cited wherein he defines comfort level in French class as not having to worry about what he is wearing:

> "Well, because I'm a senior in that class, I'm totally comfortable in that class. I'm not nervous about anything or what I'm wearing, what I'm not wearing or - I'm totally comfortable in that class."

In a less dramatic way, Frank responded, "...I feel like I know everyone in this class because it was the same class last year. We all moved up. We know everybody." Adam contributed a similar sentiment: "Actually what I think it comes down to is who you are around...The classes that I'm with my friends in I am much more comfortable in."

Certainly comfort level in social terms should not be summarily dismissed, as it has some transference to academic success in the classroom, especially in the highly

sensitive communicative skills. When a student feels surrounded by a corps of non-judgmental peers, he or she is more likely to risk experimentation with the language. Nevertheless, it is easy to speculate that there may be two separate and distinct definitions of "class comfort level" at work here which render a fair comparison difficult: the coed, which defines comfort level more in social terms, and the single-sex, which defines it rather in academic terms.

The Campbell School boys who indicated a lower level of confidence in French class felt that the communicative requirements were the major obstacle to a more relaxed atmosphere. They perceived almost limitless opportunities for error in speaking the language, a characteristic they did not identify in their other courses. Evan said "...there's a much larger presence of stupid mistakes in French, like forgetting to put an apostrophe, or an accent, or forgetting to add an "s" at the end of a word."

The Patrick School boys who felt at ease in their French class mentioned several factors. Nigel felt that a sense of camaraderie among the boys ("we're all in the same boat") helped the learning atmosphere, whereas Tris opined that the teacher's style of pedagogy brought a seamless element to learning ("So you can be in that class learning French, but not actually be talking about France, just speaking in French. I like it a lot."). Those Patrick boys who felt a lower comfort level in French class cited conventional reasons, such as having always to speak in a foreign language, and not having sufficient innate ability to do well.

With respect to the potential dual definitions of "class comfort level," with the Campbell boys defining it in quasi social terms and the Patrick School boys using more academic nomenclature, I found in my classroom observations that this is distinctly

plausible. In the portions of class that were dedicated to pronunciation and accent, the Patrick boys were more comfortable than the Campbell boys in struggling to master this difficult subset of the speaking skill. The repetition aloud, both in group and solo was taken more seriously by the single-sex sample, although they were prone to some nervous scanning of their classmates during the group work, and some rogue snickering when a soloist was put on the spot. The Campbell boys did their work in the language lab and were less committed to it, as many of them simply did not participate in the group work until the teacher insisted, and even then only half-heartedly. The soloist situations were regarded for all intents and purposes as time to regale at another's misfortune, as classmates turned to face the "victim" and openly display their amusement. The soloist, for his or her part, tended as a consequence to take the occasion less seriously, often using it as an opportunity to mock the French accent or over-Americanize it. This supports a Graham and Rees finding (1995) that boys are much more likely to make an effort to speak French with proper pronunciation in the single-sex setting, as they see it as the safer of the two environments. To be sure, neither situation would be defined as "comfortable" by either sample, but it is the more serious approach by the Patrick School boys that indicates a higher level of comfort for the general academic goal of improving proficiency in French and the specific goal of developing Standard 1.1.

Both sets of boys then were able to attain a level of comfort in their surroundings, yet it was the Patrick sample that was more appropriately comfortable in engaging in Standard 1.1 activities throughout the class observations, since they more willingly engaged in the communicative activities with less teacher vigilance required. Their overall readiness, rapid transition between activities during observed classes, and more

constant us of the target language were evidence of this. These boys saw academic achievement as a source of reward and heightened status. The coed class observations revealed that a significant percentage of the boys were comfortable in the knowledge that they did not have to push themselves very hard in developing their speaking skills, and felt that status could be obtained not solely through academic achievement but via social channels as well (e.g. seniority, personality, looks, popularity, sense of humor, etc.).

Coed Preference for Single-Sex Classes

One question asked only of the Campbell sample was whether there were any courses they perceived might be more effectively taught without girls. The reason for this question was to determine if the coed boys recognized that socio-cultural issues do exist and can be discipline related. Is achievement in certain school subjects that are considered part of the female "domain" more acceptable to boys when girls are not present? The Patrick School boys were not posed this question because their distance from the coed experience would have produced nothing more than speculation.

Eleven of the twelve Campbell boys suggested that some form of segregation is at times appropriate, with health class receiving the most votes. In discussing their reasons for separating the genders for health class, physical education, or any of the other courses, they acknowledged that differences between the sexes were far more than just physiological. For the most part, they saw certain activities as somewhat less than masculine in nature or as compromising the masculine image they wished to project and as such better suited to the single-sex environment, evoking once again the issue of the coeducational environment bringing added salience to gender differences. When asked to

consider a poetry class in this light, most of the boys recognized some advantages to the single-sex environment, citing the tendency for poetry to reveal one's more sensitive side which could be uncomfortable in the coed setting. Similar to the razzing issue discussed previously, many of the boys felt that it would not be the girls who would put negative pressure on them for achieving at a high level in poetry class, but that their presence would create a certain dynamic that would increase the boys' teasing or razzing of their male classmates.

As discussed in Chapter Two, French shares this image with poetry of a somewhat feminine pursuit, a discipline that is part of the female "domain." As a language it plays naturally to the verbal advantage that females have, and as one of the more romantic of the Romance languages, carries with it an impression of effeteness (Dörnyei and Clément, 2001) that runs counter to an adolescent boy's image of what is fitting behavior for males (Rosenthal, 1999) - an image that he is quite willing to promote and defend (Dumais; 2002). The Campbell School boys were not asked directly whether their French class should be single-sex, as they had already indicated a preference for the coed environment in responding to earlier questions. Nevertheless Ken, who had interestingly enough attended a single-sex school prior to coming to Campbell, indicated that French might be a class where boys in general would do better without girls.

Conclusion

The findings of his study in general confirmed that for boys, the single-sex environment is more favorable for the development of their French speaking skills and in turn for their self-perceptions as per Standard 1.1 (ACTFL et al; 1999). As educators we

remember the call some twenty years ago for single-sex math and science classes for girls that grew out of similar circumstances: disciplines that favored boys' and not girls' cognitive make-up, a classroom environment that paid insufficient heed to the typical girl's learning style and needs, and the decline of girls' self-esteem as a consequence. The single-sex setting offers boys much of what it provided girls a generation ago: a more comfortable environment in which to take risks, a peer group that is perceived to be less judgmental, fewer distractions, and a teacher who is in tune with their learning style and cognition; in short, it is an atmosphere where they can more freely pursue academic achievement. Finally, in regards to the very difficult task of communicating in a foreign language, something is at work in the single-sex environment that convinces boys that developing the communicative skill is worth the gamble, while the coed boys tend to be more resistant to that idea. The answer resides in how safe the classroom environment feels to boys when taking the formidable risk of communicating in a foreign language.

Chapter V: Summary and Results

Introduction

As I am sure is the case for most people, my adolescent dream was never realized. I aspired to be a professional baseball player, to play outfield for the Boston Red Sox. Being cut from the baseball team as an eighth grader dampened that dream somewhat, but my dream was revived when I was sent off to a small boarding school, much smaller than my hometown's 4000 student high school with its elite athletic program. Going from being a small fish in an enormous pond to a big fish in a small one did wonders for my self-perceptions as a baseball player. Naturally I performed better in this new environment: I had hit my stride, something had clicked, I was seeing the ball better. As far as I was concerned, I had made a quantum leap as a player. It would have been easy to claim a much simpler reason: the competition was easier. Given that the talent pool was so much smaller, I was excelling in the smaller pond. In truth though, I *had* become better. With the added confidence, I became more resolute, I practiced harder, I focused more intently, I was less self-conscious, and I enjoyed the game more. With a real shot at achievement, I excelled. I never made it to Fenway Park, but I did go far beyond where I would have had I remained in my hometown.

I liken my experience as an adolescent baseball player to that of the adolescent male French student. This is not to say that many adolescent boys aspire to be French

interpreters at the U.N. or even high school French teachers for that matter. But it does underline the power of self-confidence, and the duty of educators to provide adolescents conditions that cultivate self-confidence and that help to maximize performance. When conditions are such that adolescents see themselves at a disadvantage of any sort (innate or socio-cultural, fair or unfair) when compared to a certain group of peers, there is often a hesitancy to meet the challenge of achievement (Aronson and Good; 2002), to instead withdraw and let the prophesy fulfill itself. The adolescent boy who is tongue-tied when he speaks French, yet sees it flowing more fluidly from his female classmates may feel the strong urge to pack up his tent and go home. However, as discussed in Chapter II, Aronson (2004) found that positive self-perceptions were very effective in undoing the ill effects of this problem known as "stereotype threat," indicating that it intensified or declined based on the social atmosphere and student self-perceptions. Below is a review of the data which indicates that the single-sex environment does indeed contribute significantly to counteracting the problem of boys' lower expectations and self-perceptions of effectiveness in French communicative activities when compared to girls.

Summary of Findings

This study began with a focus on the following research questions:

1) What are boys' perceptions and attitudes of themselves as Romance language learners, and specifically as communicators?
2) What are their perceptions of the impact of the gender of fellow students and the gender of the teacher? What do they believe contributes to these perceptions?

Generally speaking, whether it be in the coed or single-sex environment, boys see themselves as less effective than girls in foreign language skills, but particularly in the domain of the speaking skill. Reasons discussed reflect much of what was outlined in Chapter Two, that is that the two chief contributing factors to this perceived oral language deficiency are brain-based gender differences and socio-cultural influences. Although a significant number of boys interviewed were somewhat familiar with the gender differences theories (e.g. boys are more spatial, girls are more verbal), they were not sufficiently familiar to be able to offer much in defense or refutation of them. For the most part, the boys attributed their performance to the socio-cultural realm, acknowledging that French had feminine characteristics that rendered high achievement on a low order of priority for boys.

There was a clear correlation between the relevance for boys of these socio-cultural/cognitive influences and the presence of girls in the classroom. Boys in both settings recognized that the mere presence of girls accentuated these differences, and that generally speaking it was how male students behaved as a result of the presence of girls that was the pressure point, not the girls themselves. In other words, girls were not actively undermining boys efforts to become better speakers of French, rather their presence activated a standard of behavior on the part of boys in the class that impeded improvement. This could be in the form of disruptive "grandstanding" in order to impress the girls, or withholding oral participation for fear of making an embarrassing public mistake.

The relevance of teacher gender to boys' enhanced self-perceptions was less clear. Most of the Patrick School boys (ten of twelve) revealed that they preferred having a

male French teacher, indicating that their teacher understood male learning styles, male interests, and how to effectively lead young men in a collective effort. This made for a more orderly yet relaxed classroom ambiance which facilitated learning. The Campbell boys were far less committed to a need for a male French teacher. Since they were accustomed to a learning environment led by a woman, they might not see any potential for improvement simply based on teacher gender. Nevertheless, several Campbell students did refer to a former male French teacher as being very effective.

The question of teacher gender and its relevance to boys' achievement in the classroom garnered more defensive responses from the coed sample, several of whom were quite sure there was no such connection. To a lesser degree, responses of a similar tone were given on the question of brain-based gender differences that favored males. Most of them agreed that girls were more verbal than boys, but fewer were willing to assert that boys might hold the advantage in the spatial realm. It was almost as if the Campbell boys felt that by acknowledging some natural innate gender advantage for boys, or by suggesting that male teachers are more effective for boys than female teachers, they would be branded sexist. In any event, the Patrick School boys felt more at liberty to admit that they preferred male French teachers, and that girls and boys may have different brain-based strengths.

Discussion of Findings

Students benefit from high self-perceptions when they believe they are mastering content and learning in depth and breadth. Good grades generally follow such mastery. Grades however are not always a reliable way to measure true self-perception; many

adults recall that the classes in which they learned the most were often the ones in which they did not earn "*A's*." Conversely, content from some of the classes where we received "*A's*" was never mastered and is now long forgotten. Majorities from both samples felt they were good to excellent students in their French classes (7/12 for the Campbell School; 9/12 for the Patrick School), yet five of the seven from the Campbell School felt they were not learning as much as they could. When added to the five that did not consider themselves good students of French, we have a surprising ten out of twelve from the coed sample that felt they were not reaching their potential. Of the nine Patrick boys who felt they were good to excellent, eight felt they were learning a lot, as did two of the three who defined themselves as mediocre students of French. Clearly, when comparing these two data sets we see a higher level of overall self-perceptions in the single-sex class which result from myriad sources to be discussed later in this chapter, among them is a relaxed yet challenging atmosphere which is conducive to academic achievement.

Part of any rigorous foreign language class is the requirement that students use the target language to express themselves. Both teachers were clear with this expectation, yet as discussed in the last chapter, student buy-in was much stronger in the single-sex classroom. The expectation that students make an earnest effort to use class time as an opportunity to practice French is characteristic of a class that builds in its students high self-perceptions as speakers. A class where students willingly comply with this requirement is evidence thereof. Whereas the Patrick School boys willingly used French in the paired activities, relied upon it in their questions with the teacher, insofar as they strived to pronounce it with an authentic French accent, and where they were otherwise more at ease contributing in French and listening to their classmates' contributions in the

target language, their peers at the Campbell School were not. The coed classes were more disjointed and fractured, due in large part to a lack of ownership on the part of the students of their own learning. This condition required the teacher to continuously "rally the troops" to convince them to re-engage with the material. Moments of transition from one activity to the next were often considered chances to chat in English with neighbors, and, while the teacher would expend valuable time and effort reining in one group, another would break off task. My sense was that at any given moment in the classes I observed, a randomly selected Patrick student could have told me what the students were learning that day and how it fit into the larger goal of attaining proficiency. Many, if not most, of the coed sample would have struggled to answer such a question.

As a result of less classroom discipline, structure, and the difficult transitional periods, the coed classroom atmosphere is simply less conducive to developing the requisite oral skills which result in high self-perceptions. It is plausible of course that these conditions are due at least in part to individual teacher tendencies and overall quality, an issue which I will address in the "Limitations to Study" section found later in this chapter. In any event, the Patrick School classes functioned more as a collective unit while the Campbell classes were characterized less by a collective goal and more by many individual goals, a large number of which were more social than academic. The coed sample was more likely to see high achievement as outlined in Standard 1.1 as beyond their means, too high a bar to reach. We recall Evan's quote in which he depicts the challenge of speaking French in class as something "...which is what only the naturals tend to do." This attitude of resignation indicates that the locus of control is elsewhere, not with the individual student, and is pervasive in the coed classroom,

manifesting itself in the student focus on a more social agenda rather than on French. As discussed in Chapter Two, Hulse (1997) and Cairns (1990) found coed boys far more likely to attribute their academic underperformance to external factors such as bad luck or fate (not being a "natural," as Evan phrased it), whereas single-sex school boys felt more in control of their own learning, which stemmed from what Cairns (1990) termed an "...increased sense of cognitive competence and a more inner-oriented locus of control" (p.210). In Chapter Two we considered Lee and Bryk's (1986) findings that suggested students in the single-sex environment were more able to separate the social realm from the academic, resulting in a sharper overall focus on studies. Hulse (1997) sums up the coed school boy's situation in a tail-wagging-the-dog fashion when she asserts that "...the social agenda in coeducational schools is more in charge of the coed boys than they are of themselves" (p. 9).

This phenomenon was evident after analysis of the two sets of coed data. Where the coed class observations indicated a stronger concern for the social elements in French class on the part of both boys and girls, the interviews tended to support the concept that some of the boys felt frustrated that they were not learning more. The disconnect between the consequences of their classroom behavior and their performance was compelling to say the least and speaks to the overwhelming draw of the social agenda in the coed classroom. The Campbell School boys were much more likely to chat with classmates during crucial instruction in class, then protest the level of difficulty of the class in the interviews. Doing well was mildly important to many of them, but not nearly important enough to forsake the social agenda in the classroom in favor of diligent academic effort.

Given the Patrick School boys' willingness to put forth an earnest effort in class, their higher level of attentiveness, their more frequent participation, and their consistent use of the target language, they were less disposed than their Campbell counterparts to assign French to the female domain. Achievement in the Patrick French class appeared to be "image-friendly," i.e. it did not breach acceptable norms of male behavior, a condition which undoubtedly helps those students retain higher self-perceptions when compared to the Campbell sample. As mentioned earlier, one obvious reason for the Patrick sample's comfort in achieving in French is the fact that there are no girls present in classes; as a consequence, all the high achievers who model successful behavior are male. Another persuasive factor is the fact that the French department is staffed by male teachers who were credited in the interviews with understanding boys and their learning styles, and who preside over a relaxed yet focused atmosphere that promotes learning. This is well aligned with Williams, Burden, and Lanvers' (2002) finding that part of the reason that boys tended to see achievement in French as outside the confines of appropriate male behavior was the lack of male French teachers.

Several of the Patrick School sample described their environment as "question-friendly," where inquisitiveness is not frowned upon by other boys but rather is an expected mode of classroom behavior. We recall that Standard 1.1 of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages requires that "Students engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions"(p. 9), and that according to Hoff-Sommers (2000), coed boys are loath to express opinions and feelings lest they appear to be engaging in feminine behavior. The Patrick School boys were far less concerned about this "image" than were

the Campbell boys, who indicated that they would be more likely to participate in class if there were no girls present. As mentioned previously numerous times, this is because the presence (or the lack) of girls constitutes a key ingredient that drastically alters the classroom dynamic as regards how comfortable boys feel about going against socio-cultural norms and achieving at a high level in French. Boys in the presence of other boys comport themselves differently than they do when girls are present. Evidence of this in the Campbell classes was manifest, with the boys far more focused on chatting or even flirting in some cases with girls than on developing their French speaking skills. Even the boys who defined themselves and were recognized by classmates in the interviews as excellent French students were wary about actively and openly participating due to the "image" issue. Adam from the Campbell School was mentioned by several students as fitting this profile of excellence. Not only a very good student, Adam is also an excellent hockey player who receives the typical status boost from his exploits on the ice. Nevertheless, in our interview Adam spoke about a classroom atmosphere that did not welcome inquiry, wherein students who had questions and were invited to ask them would for the most part not oblige. His theory is that most boys are self-conscious and do not want to be seen as needing any help. Adam and a handful of other Campbell male pupils who are considered solid students of French did not excessively engage in the sidebar conversations and other off-task behavior, yet neither did they actively engage in what most would consider normative behavior for success in the French classroom: willing participation in the target language, careful note-taking, or posing questions for clarification. They maintained a fine line between caring too much and too little. To use exclusively French in class, to help the teacher and classmates through their own active

participation, to take copious notes all indicates a deep desire to do well which may run counter to the standard image for boys in the coed setting. On the other hand, these students understand the importance of doing well in school and do wish to be successful in this less than friendly academic atmosphere, so they travel the bumpy path trying to maintain the difficult balance of achieving in French without compromising their image.

Life seems so much simpler in the single-sex Patrick School, where the boys benefited from what Hulse (1997) considered an environment that offers a wider definition of appropriate male behavior, which allows the boys more latitude and flexibility in the way of image. In my observations of the Patrick School classes, I noticed how much harder it was to distinguish individual characteristics: all the boys wore jackets and ties, all were attentive, most if not all were prepared for class, and all understood and accepted the challenge of using French in class. I could not easily distinguish one social clique from another. This was a collective unit working toward class goals which included improving and refining their oral French skills. In contrast, in their physical appearance and classroom behavior, the Campbell School boys represented a wide array of *social* images: the jocks, the nerds, the preppies for example. But for the most part one academic image prevailed in their classroom - one which placed a low priority on achievement in French, and in particular the speaking skill.

The issue of how students from both venues viewed their school and its role in their education is compelling and has been discussed in the prior chapter. Boys from the coed Campbell School cited the need to establish and maintain friendships with females as an important element in a well rounded education. Although they acknowledged that the single-sex setting held certain academic advantages such as fewer distractions and a

more relaxed atmosphere for learning, they held fast to the need to learn with their female peers. The notion that boys from single-sex schools enter their coed colleges with severe social deficiencies is somewhat prevalent among Campbell boys. One boy who learned that I had been educated in a single-sex secondary school asked me how many years it took me to feel comfortable around girls again. Some of the Patrick boys also mentioned this factor as possible justification for introducing girls into their school, although in general the consensus among the Patrick boys was that an environment free of girls was an environment free of distractions. We recall Don, the Campbell student who asserted he was comfortable in his French class because he was a senior, and didn't have to worry about such things as what he was wearing. Don had little concern for the academic image he projected to his classmates, as he was quite content to depend on these underclassmen to interpret instructions, lend him a pen, and to otherwise help him through the class. His status was guaranteed by his age, thus he felt no need to work to attain any further status through academic channels. The coed class is an environment that places disproportionate value on social status; as a result, students respond in kind by working to develop their social skills.

In the single-sex setting, the boys set themselves about the business of learning French. There was some informal banter before the teacher initiated the lesson, but once it began, they were quickly and entirely on board. This is due to the lack of girls ("the pleasant distraction" as one of them phrased it) and a school culture that considers academic achievement its first priority. These two factors are tightly intertwined. Much of the Patrick's School's success in conveying the message that academics are of foremost importance is the fact that the major distraction has been removed: girls. The boys spoke

openly and honestly about how much more socially complex French class would be with girls, how difficult it would be to concentrate, and how collective academic goals would be placed on the back burner. The uniformity in dress, in school gender, and for the most part in religious denomination all contribute to the shared goals concept which leads the boys toward the academics first mindset. Indeed, the Patrick boys are more serious in their pursuit of scholarship and more accepting of class goals around academics.

I wish to make one final remark about the claim that coeducation better prepares boys for dealing with girls: the socializing that I witnessed in my Campbell observations was often of a flirtatious nature and in some cases further suggestive still. One Campbell boy who was not selected for interview incessantly regaled two female students, a very willing audience, throughout an entire class. Some of their topics of discussion were unfit for mixed company and brought to mind Lee, Marks, and Bryk's (1994) finding that coed schools are "primary sites for sexist socialization" (p. 92), where stereotypes based on gender are not weakened but reinforced. Throughout this study I have raised Lawrie and Brown's (1992) conclusion that the coed environment does not necessarily dissipate stereotypes but may strengthen them. Furthermore, Cohen and Roper (1972) found that only with a well devised and deliberate plan did the coed environment hope to bring stereotypes under control. Hulse (1997) administered the "Sex Role Egalitarianism Scale Test" to her sample, finding that "...in all five sub-categories, the boys' school boys hold more egalitarian attitudes at a statistically significant level towards men's and women's roles in society than do coed school boys" (p. 15). The sub-categories measured were boys' attitudes towards marital, parental, employment, socio-interpersonal-heterosexual, and educational roles of both men and women in our society.

The socialization that I observed in the coed class is not the kind I would want my adolescent son or daughter to experience; not in the social milieu of the lunchroom and certainly not in the academic setting of a French class. Devised without adequate thought about how academic and social gender differences will be addressed, coed schools can be a training ground for reinforcing traditional stereotypes. Single-sex schools understand that educating the whole child entails keeping it simple: academics, extra-curricular, and social are all best treated independently. By emphasizing academics during the day and leaving socialization for evenings and weekends at the boys' discretion, the single-sex experience reinforces that there is a time and a place for everything, and class time is the time for developing academic skills.

As mentioned above, the coed environment appears to function less as a cohesive unit and more as a disjointed collection of sub-units. Groups of homogeneous students band together and circle the wagons as a means of protecting themselves against the social pressures of the coed classroom. We remember Adam, the very competent French student and hockey player par excellence who indicated that he believed much of the success in developing speaking skills in French class is based on "who is around you." Adam believed that one participates more when surrounded by friends who can help diffuse any negative pressure from outside the protective circle and presumably offer support when a job is well done. This seems a completely natural and desirable situation, for we all appreciate the encouragement of friends when we expose ourselves to scrutiny. The single-sex class was not split into factions, instead it operated much more as a whole unit. This is due to the friendlier environment for risk-taking that removes the need for insulation from other factions (of which there really were none that I could discern). If

Adam, with his substantial social capital (as an excellent student and hockey player), appreciated the protection of his coterie of friends, how might a less popular student without such talents feel? Had Sir Isaac Newton been a coed French teacher he might have reasoned that for every student comfort level met, there are equal or greater student comfort needs left unmet. In fact, there are large numbers of students who feel unprotected, whose support group is insufficient or carries too little social status to be effective. Therefore, they are forced to make a decision: participate and risk negative feedback from peers, or resist participating and developing the speaking skill. It is unfortunate that such a decision has to be made, and too often it is made to the detriment of the student's academic performance. It is a special adolescent indeed who would exchange social status and acceptance for proper development of the French speaking skill.

The coed classroom is an edgy atmosphere that is nonetheless interesting and meaningful in certain ways for adolescents because they are discovering many things about themselves socially. When we take girls out of the equation however, the social relevance loses steam and academic concerns return to the forefront. The "excitement" is gone and the conditions are reset to focus on what is important. This is why we have heard the coed classroom described as more anxiety-ridden, and the single-sex environment characterized as more relaxed and laid-back. When it concerns Standard 1.1, the development of French speaking skills, and the evolution of these skills into higher self-perceptions, the single-sex classroom provides the more appropriate social/academic setting for achievement.

The presence of teasing or "razzing," as it is referred to above is a crucial factor in how comfortable students feel in the French classroom. As noted in Chapter Four, boys viewed most of the razzing as supportive - their peers cared enough about them to tease them. However, there was a consensus from both sample sets that razzing occasionally spills over into the negative domain, and as such could have repercussions on the amount and frequency that recipients and others in the class participate. Since we improve our speaking skills through repetition, this decrease in practice would naturally lower our self-perceptions as speakers.

The Patrick School boys benefited from far more classroom control than their Campbell counterparts with regard to teasing and razzing. Moreover, since there were no girls present, whatever input they received from their classmates was constructive, because it was intended to show support, not impress the girls. When Unser of the single-sex sample finished reciting part of a dialogue, his neighbor leaned over and whispered with a flair, "C'est bon, c'est bon" (That's good). Unser chuckled at the superficial insincerity of the compliment, but he understood the deeper sincerity underneath: it really *was* a job well done. Seeing that classroom participation in French is an acceptable mode of behavior, he would be ready to participate again the next time. This is an environment whose control promotes healthy self-perceptions. In the coed classroom, less classroom control manifests itself in more discourteous behavior, e.g. while a classmate is engaged in speaking, another sarcastically and loudly blurts, "What is he saying?" or blatantly ignores him or engages in sidebar chatting (in some ways worse than razzing itself). The presence of both genders sharpens the tone of the razzing and increases the likelihood that students will be drawn away from paying courteous attention when a classmate puts

forth the risk of developing his speaking skill. When students feel little or no validation for their efforts, they begin to perceive that the reward falls far short of the risk. The result: less participation and lower self-perceptions as defined in Standard 1.1.

In general terms, there is a correlation between comfort level and familiarity. That which is familiar to us or is part of our routine falls within the parameters of our comfort level. This was true of both sample sets who, when asked about their class comfort levels, for the most part described adequate to high levels in their respective environments. With only some exceptions however, the coed sample discussed and displayed a level of comfort that often manifested itself in off-task behavior. Speaking more English than French, participating in sidebar conversations and razzing, and contributing slightly inappropriate comments are some examples. These students felt that such behavior did not overstep the limits of class decorum. There was less academic rigor to make the students uncomfortable, and the increase in socializing rendered class somewhat agreeable. By contrast, in my interviews with the Patrick sample there was no further prompting needed to get at the essential data, as their responses and classroom behavior indicated a comfortable acceptance of the rigorous academic goals. To be sure there was some talk of occasionally feeling ill at ease in class, but this was in reaction to academic, not social stimuli: not feeling ready for a quiz, or not agreeing with the teacher's homework assignment format for example. The question on imminent speaking revealed more pertinent data on comfort level as it pertains to self-perceptions as speakers of French: How do you feel when your turn to provide information, give an opinion, or express feelings/emotions before the class is imminent? Would you feel more or less self-conscious with girls present? Both sample sets agreed that the presence of girls in this

situation hinders their confidence levels, effectiveness in speaking French, willingness to volunteer for fear of gross errors, and overall development of oral skills which lead to higher self-perceptions.

One of the more apparent results of this study was the difference in the distraction element between single-sex and coed environments. The consensus among both sets of boys was that girls were a distraction - often through no fault of their own, merely on account of their presence. This is of course a major factor in the collective class attitude of "social first, academic second" that is pervasive in the coed classroom. The boys posture for the girls who provide often subtle yet encouraging feedback. Frequently this posturing is manifest in ways that are disruptive to the academic goals of the class: shouting out in English, over-Americanization of the French accent, discourteous tone, and other uncooperative behavior. Boys who attempt to gain recognition through academic channels are not encouraged. Instead they are frequently scoffed and labeled conformists. One can only speculate what pressures these boys experience outside of class when they encounter classmates who disapprove of their good intentions to improve their French in class. When Jamie from the coed Campbell talks about receiving occasional negative feedback from classmates ("They tend to just tell you something really nasty in your face like after class"), it becomes evident that inner strength and resolve are useful traits in attaining proficiency in the coed French class.

So much of this complex challenge in the coed environment of teaching boys French comes back to the presence of both genders together in class. The desire to impress girls and fortify an image is powerful in holding coed boys back from achieving. In the single-sex setting, academic achievement is a principal currency. The boys

function as a unit with more coherence and less role-playing. In the Campbell class, I observed the class clown (a couple of these), the flirt, the jock, the preppy, the senior, all of whom were far more concerned with projecting their own image than developing their French-speaking skills. In the Patrick classes, I could not discern who had what image, which of course is much of the point behind the school's dress code of jackets and ties. Individuality, although an integral part of the fabric of American culture, can impede educational goals and may be best set aside until adolescents are wise enough to control it, instead of allowing it to control them. This is not to say that single-sex schools function as quasi-military organizations where individuality is willfully suppressed. In my interviews it was clear that these boys had interests and passions, and that they identified with certain groups and images. The school's mission statement talks about developing a wider skill base that extends beyond academics as well. Certainly the spiritual side is emphasized, as each class began with a prayer in French and there are community service requirements outside of school. There were indeed jocks, nerds, and other groups, but these identities were set aside while in class and provided no challenge to learning. What I experienced at the Patrick School supported Lee, Bryk, and Holland's finding that it is the culture of the single-sex Catholic school to use a strong sense of community to work toward shared academic goals (1993), whereas my observations from the coed Campbell School concluded that the more fragile sense of community allowed a detrimental form of individuality to flourish in the classroom and contributed to a weaker culture of academic achievement. As mentioned above, I found that the single-sex element was the key ingredient in establishing Lee, Bryk, and Holland's concept of a strong sense of community which leads to these shared academic goals.

We recall that student perceptions of the importance of teacher gender varied depending on the school: Patrick students felt a male teacher was helpful to their development as speakers of French and healthy self-perceptions, and Campbell students felt that teacher gender was inconsequential. The Campbell students mentioned individual teacher effectiveness as the crucial characteristic in nourishing student self-perceptions - certainly a difficult point to dispute. If one considers classroom control, careful monitoring of negative razzing, and the ability to keep students on task as elements of teacher effectiveness, then there may be an advantage to single-sex environment, since the social "rating and dating" element that exists in coed classes and the razzing to impress the opposite gender are absent, which is likely to result in increased on-task behavior. The Patrick boys acknowledged that their male teacher keeps them focused, under control, knows how to talk to them and otherwise deal with them so as to foster learning. Although most of the Campbell boys dismissed teacher gender as playing a significant role in their learning atmosphere, my class observations suggested that many of the boys who engaged in off-task behavior would have benefited from a firmer, more disciplined pedagogical approach, strategies that the Patrick boys credit their teacher with having. But would this then have some alienating effect on the girls? Possibly, which raises Dee's (2006) point that single-sex schools for both genders with their high percentages of same-gender teachers are effective in avoiding the zero sum game, i.e. where there is improvement for one gender, there is an equal decline for the other.

As mentioned at the outset of Chapter Three, the Campbell boys come from similar racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds as their Patrick counterparts, yet

their respective classroom behaviors reflect vast differences in the way they view education in the French classroom. If we take two sets of twelve boys, similar in many ways, and put them on a field with a ball, initially there is very little difference. Only when they begin playing do we see how important the ball is, for it dictates how they behave and interact with one another. A soccer ball, a football, and a baseball all produce dramatically different actions by the same boys. When the groups change balls, their behavior changes too. Were we to take girls out of the coed classroom and start fresh, a new set of classroom norms would prevail. These same Campbell boys who once claimed to prefer the coed environment, would find the conditions more favorable to their academic achievement. They would find as they cautiously stepped into a different game with a different ball that what was acceptable is now a foul, and what was regarded as an iron-clad rule is now frowned upon as counter to the game's objective. It seems as though we are ill-equipping our coed boys to play the game of learning to speak French. It is like trying to play soccer with a football - a frustrating experience fraught with misplays, strange bounces, and impediments to the revelation of true talent. The single-sex French classroom fosters the best in all boys, by providing immunity to socio-cultural issues, by limiting distractions, and by allowing a more concentrated pedagogy to tend to their gender-based needs; in short, optimal conditions for achievement.

Limitations to the Study

There were several limitations to this study. Given that it was conducted in only two small schools of similar socio-economic strata in the Northeast United States using very moderate sample sizes, it is difficult to generalize these findings to the wider

community. In a similar fashion, school specific or teacher specific characteristics may have accounted for some of the discrepancies I encountered, i.e. an unusually talented teacher or students in either environment could have disproportionately affected results. As discussed above, measures were taken to ensure similar pedagogical emphases by both teachers, which may have lent some control to potential teacher differences. Sharing pedagogical emphases however is not tantamount to sharing the same level of effectiveness, as teachers must be able to deliver the product. As a trained teacher evaluator with ample experience on both ends of classroom evaluations, I found the factor of teacher quality similar enough to render these findings dependable. Nevertheless, there remains the possibility that teacher style, quality, and overall effectiveness play a role in complicating the reliability of these findings.

As discussed in Chapter One, theories about gender differences tend to invite close scrutiny because they are viewed to be essentialist when these differences are believed to result from collective natural biological make-ups, their *essence* if you will. Critics of essentialism claim that whatever differences exist between men and women, or one group of people over another, are socio-culturally induced, that there are no separate innate male/female paradigms. In a critique of her former mentor, Gilligan (1982) inferred that Kohlberg based his work on human morality on an essentialist foundation since he asserted that only men could attain the highest level of morality in his "Stages of Moral Development" (1958). In an ironic twist, feminists later made similar claims against Gilligan for appearing to use white middle class women as the paradigm for all women in her book *In A Different Voice,* without accounting for racial, class, sexual preference, or other issues of individual background that shape each person's perceptions.

Kerber (1986) asserted that "...by emphasizing the biological basis of distinctive behavior..., Gilligan permits...that women's alleged affinity for 'relationships of care' is both biologically natural and a good thing" (p. 309). Heyes (1997) stated that "in making overly general claims about women...second wave feminist theory tended to erase women's diversity" (p. 144).

As discussed previously, I deliberately sought homogeneous sample sets so that I could first determine if a majority condition existed, which would then be followed by a recommendation for further research among minority students. There was no assumption whatsoever that these mostly white upper middle class boys speak for all boys when they discuss their self-perceptions as French speakers.

Finally, gender-based brain differences may have evolved into separate models over the millennia as a result of socio-cultural forces. Early man's capacity to find his way home after a lengthy hunt (this ancient spatial ability which many experts now claim helps in developing architectural and engineering skills) may simply have developed in the male because he was the hunter and needed that skill. Similarly, women's innate verbal abilities may have evolved as a result of the duties that her ancient communities imposed on her (childrearing and other domestic responsibilities that were more likely to require interactive, communicative skills). There is no hard claim here then in support of the essentialist argument; in fact, as I have suggested numerous times throughout the document, and as most any educator will affirm, there is such diversity in differences between all individuals regardless of their gender, race, social class, sexual preference or other category that any attempt to bestow "ownership" of a behavioral tendency on one

gender or another is folly and does a disservice to the enormous strength in forming us that social and cultural forces wield.

This study set out to determine a majority culture condition, and as such originally set out to include only Caucasian students. My sense is that including African-American or Latino students in this study might have introduced other variables than those discussed in Chapter Two, variables that affect their level of achievement across the spectrum. Even subtle teacher racial bias for example would have presented a competing effect on these minority student self-perceptions, as would have English language issues for Latino students. In particular however, I was conscious of the ramifications surrounding the Achievement Gap. Therefore, as my intent was to isolate socio-cultural and brain-based issues and how they affect communicative output in the single-sex versus coed environments, I initially chose to include only Caucasian students, which would effectively remove the Achievement Gap as a competing issue. However, in order to comply with the sample requirement of twenty-four, I was forced to include several Asian-Americans in the study. My hope is that since Asian-American students tend to occupy the same side of the Achievement Gap divide as their Caucasian counterparts, their self-perceptions as regards communicating in French would be left unaffected by the issue of race and the data I received would pertain predominantly to those issues I discuss in Chapter Two (e.g. gender/brain differences, socio-cultural influences, etc.).

I also sought to obtain data from the middle section of student range, due to my belief (and the conventional wisdom) that excellent students will excel regardless of the environment and that poor students will struggle irrespective of their setting. As the most susceptible and measurable group, the middle range boys would provide me with the

optimal data for analyzing the extent of coed versus single-sex influences on student self-perceptions of efficacy. Consequently I initially decided to approach students in the C to B+ range. In the end, I was forced to accept students from across the achievement spectrum as there were not enough middle to upper range students to comply with my sample number requirements of twelve per group. Therefore, some results from the upper and lower performing students I may have unfairly attributed to the environment, when in actuality those student self-perceptions could be invariant and impervious to environment.

A common critique of studies like this one that compare a public school sample to a private school sample is that quite often a crucial variable is not controlled - family value on the importance of education. By and large, families who send their children to private schools tend to assign considerable import to school and education. Why else would families pay for something that can be obtained for free? Students who are raised in such an ethos will have more books in their home, will read more, and will do better in school. Moreover, as a Catholic school that emphasizes developing the spiritual persona, the shared mission and sense of community which lead to academic efficacy that the Patrick students appeared to fully grasp may be a result of the religious aspect more than the single-sex aspect (Bryk, Lee, and Holland; 1993). As mentioned in Chapter Three, the coed Campbell School is regarded as one of the premier public high schools in the country, listed in the top one hundred public high schools in U.S. News and World Report (Kelly, 2007), and it enjoys significant support from the family community. Per capita income in the town is among the highest in the state, and over 95% of Campbell graduates go on to attend four year colleges. Campbell faculty are among the best

compensated and trained teachers in the state, with the large majority enjoying "highly skilled" status (Master's degree plus certification). All of these factors contribute to a school community that in many ways has a private school mentality which I believe sufficiently controls this variable.

As discussed earlier, some of the Campbell students were former students of mine, or younger siblings of former students. This may have colored the way in which they responded to my questions or behaved in class. One boy included me in his list of former teachers whose styles he felt helped him maximize his talents, letting a smile slip as he uttered my name. Another mentioned our former class during my observation of his current class. Both were seemingly innocuous references yet indicated nevertheless a prior history that has potential to influence student responses. In both of the above cases and in other such interactions, I moved quickly past these comments and brought the conversation or observation back to the present.

Finally, as a graduate of a private single-sex high school who met with success in French and went to become a French and Spanish teacher, I may have some subconscious researcher bias that affected how I received, analyzed, and presented the data. My own secondary experience has led me to success in the field of Romance languages, results which the biased researcher might feel can be generalized to the population, but I believe this is amply offset by my status as a former teacher at the Campbell School. I am confident that my familiarity with, respect for, and experience in the outstanding work that the Campbell School does in preparing its young men and women has a countering effect on whatever bias I may feel.

Implications for Practice

Brain-based gender differences need to be recognized as a possible source of some gender disparity in achievement in certain fields, foreign languages being one of them. This initiative is well underway in many districts, in the form of differentiated instruction. Differentiation involves familiarizing oneself with individual student learning tendencies (such as styles, interests, and levels of readiness), and teaching to them in a regular, revolving way so no needs are left unmet. Teachers should be vigilant for strengths and weaknesses and use the former to their advantage as they seek to tend to the latter. In addressing the smaller individual differences between students, teachers would most certainly minister to the larger gender-based issues, which in many cases will cross over gender lines (as discussed in Chapter Two).

Socio-cultural factors must also be confronted if we are serious about teaching our boys French. As it is today, and as I hope I have outlined sufficiently throughout this document, there are few reasons why boys should feel encouraged to take French. American society views French language and culture through an effeminate lens, promoting an image which is surely not lost on adolescent boys. High achievement in French comes at some risk to boys as it is akin to having mastery of a feminine skill, and we recall Dumais' (2002) finding that adolescent boys are committed to enforcing rigid adherence to gender boundaries. For better or for worse, many feel that French effeteness is counter to American modes of masculinity. Therefore, some concentrated effort on the part of French teachers may go a long way toward rectifying the "image" problem that plagues French. A de-emphasis on traditional French literature and culture, so much of which involves romantic themes, and a redirection toward more contemporary literature

and culture topics that appeal to boys may be in order. In the way of contrast, Spanish students are exposed to a more gender-equitable array of literature and popular culture figures, from the chivalric and heroic Don Quijote de la Mancha to current boxers, singers, and baseball players, all of whom model traditional masculine characteristics that lend a certain value and acceptability to adolescent boys. French teachers would do well to widen their array to include some such models. It may be as well that our attempts to redefine masculinity along more effeminate lines, e.g. the "sensitive" male, has driven some males away from French. Perhaps some embracing of this traditional model of masculinity is in order.

As regards specifically self-perceptions of efficacy in the speaking skill, teachers should strive to give this skill equal time with the other skills, namely listening, reading, and writing. What happens often is that teachers subconsciously allow students to gravitate away from their weaker skills toward their stronger skill sets, so boys might typically be held to a lower standard on the speaking rubric in the hope that they recuperate lost ground in a writing exercise. If boys appear content not to participate in French, they must be drawn out. This is again where the movement toward differentiated instruction might serve to alleviate the problem, as teachers are encouraged to develop all the skills of all the students. Refraining from granting the speaking skill short shrift is essential in raising boys' self-perceptions. Providing opportunities to speak about topics they enjoy and about which they feel passionate is an effective way of encouraging boys to practice their speaking.

In order to persuade boys that French is within the realm of acceptability, teachers need to provide a controlled classroom setting where "academics first" is the modus

operandi. As suggested above, if coed students do indeed view education more in social terms than in academic ones, it may be more challenging for their teachers to preside over this setting as it would require some corrective measures. When social considerations are foremost on students' minds, all the socio-cultural issues cited above (i.e. French as an effeminate pursuit, French plays to innate female skills), come into play. When teachers have established clear priorities for academics in class as opposed to socializing, it is far easier to convey the message that achievement is acceptable behavior for boys.

Teachers of course should not be left to fend for themselves in such endeavors as those cited above, as tending to many of the gender-based learning differences and socio-cultural issues can be sensitive work. Providing training on natural gender differences and socio-cultural issues surrounding French (and other disciplines) would be logical first steps.

Finally, if scheduling allows, schools should consider the option of single-sex French classes. Title IX regulations have been relaxed to the point where this is a feasible step. As long as there is support that this will improve boys' performance in French, and girls are provided with either single-sex or coed same level classes, it should pass constitutional muster. The difficulty with this measure stems more from scheduling issues than legal ones however. Moreover, French (or any other foreign languages for that matter) does not enjoy the status that math or the sciences do, hence giving French a high enough level of priority to justify such scheduling is also a challenge. In short, Administrators must provide French teachers with significant and varied support if boys are to thrive in the coed French classroom.

Implications for Policy

This study suggests that the single-sex environment is effective in raising boys' self-perceptions of competence in communicative activities in French. Recent moderations in the interpretation of Title IX (which assert that no student shall be excluded from participating in any educational program receiving federal funds on the basis of gender) has allowed certain activities to benefit from single-sex participation when a coed or another single-sex option is provided. When educational experts decried a generation ago the lagging performance of girls in math and science, the response included altering pedagogical approaches to tend to girls' collective learning styles, and providing single-sex classes where possible. As a result of that "call-to-arms," the gap between girls' and boys' achievement levels in both these disciplines has been noticeably reduced. Similar action may be required if we are to help boys follow suit. As discussed above, recognizing the existence of varied learning styles and a commitment to alter pedagogy to minister to them is an important first step. Providing a single-sex environment is an appropriate second step that would effectively counteract the powerful socio-cultural factors that inhibit boys and dissuade them from taking achievement in French seriously.

Public high schools might do well to split French enrollment into male and female sections. Where there are both male and female teachers, same-gender arrangements should be made if possible. Understandably, given the low percentage of boys enrolling in French, this may only be possible in the larger schools where higher numbers allow for such flexibility. It is this type of bold action that is needed if we are to salvage the French language's viability as a standard part of American curriculum. As it stands today,

French, like foreign language in general, is quickly becoming a discipline for females alone, where as Carr and Pauwels (2006) found "...boys for the most part disappear" (p.1). Providing the safe haven for boys that is the single-sex classroom may be an initial measure in helping French regain its stature as a mainstream course in American curricula.

Implications for Further Research

As discussed in the preceding section, a study on single-sex male and single-sex female classes within one coed school with a comparative analysis to determine their respective effectiveness would be enormously cogent. This would clarify the strength of school culture both as a factor within the classroom and outside it. In other words, it would control the separate schools/separate cultures argument that some might claim influence the results of this study. When we compare classes from different schools, naturally there is no control for particular school culture which may sway results in favor of one environment over the other, regardless of its student make-up. It is difficult to ascertain how much of the Patrick School boys' success is due to school culture as opposed to the single-sex aspect of their French class (although as discussed earlier, the two are intertwined). Such a within-school study would isolate the school culture issue and allow researchers to focus on the two sets of classroom dynamics.

One of the more important overlying themes of this study, presented and discussed in Chapter Two, is the tendency for students and other educational community members to assign certain disciplines to the masculine or feminine domains. Despite the strides girls have made in math and science mentioned above, boys continue to

outperform girls in these two chief curricular fields, as well as in computer science. Similarly, girls outperform boys in the humanities disciplines: English (particularly the creative writing courses), foreign languages, and many electives. Ultimately, since students of one gender are directed out either by their own choice or through covert channeling, we end up with gender domination in certain fields, such as physics and engineering by men. Cycles that begin due in large part to brain-based differences are reinforced and perpetuated by socio-cultural forces that require that our young people swim against a strong current if they are to meet with success. True equity in our work force can only be ensured by aggressively investigating the belief that boys are better at math and girls are better readers, emphasizing that despite whatever innate differences exist, within-gender differences are far greater still, and that all disciplines belong to all students. Further studies on brain differences, effective pedagogical practices to compensate for such differences, socio-cultural forces associated with achievement across these gender lines and how best to deal with them, and what role if any single-sex education would play in narrowing these gender differences and widening career path options to both boys and girls would be pertinent follow-up steps.

As mentioned earlier, the decision to exclude African-American and Latino students from this study was based on the belief that any such finding that students of these groups suffered from lower self-perceptions as concerns Standard 1.1 might be attributed to achievement gap issues instead of the innate, brain-based, and socio-cultural issues discussed in Chapter Two. Establishing a majority culture condition first before moving on to other demographics seemed a logical decision. This said, a subsequent study on African-American and Latino-American students would be of great interest to

determine the overlapping issues and whether these two questions (i.e. single-sex versus coeducation on boys' self-perceptions, and the achievement gap) converge at a single-sex crossroads. Riordan (1990) found that the single-sex setting is indeed better for minority culture boys' overall self-esteem; it could be that communicative abilities in foreign language are a subset of the larger achievement gap issue.

Another interesting follow-up study would be to investigate the connection between established superior self-perceptions and improved achievement with regard to French communicative activities. Might better self-perceptions serve as precursors to an improved level of achievement? My sense is that they certainly do, and Steele and Aronson's work (1995) supports this claim in a number of core curricula subjects. Adolescents are keenly aware that teachers grade differently and that tying their self-perceptions to the grade is often futile. They trust their senses to ascertain their own level of achievement. Students know, sometimes despite the grade, when they have achieved close to their potential, and when they have not. We often hear students talk glowingly of difficult classes where they earned a mediocre grade, yet learned so much. Conversely, other students talk in bored tones about classes for which they received a "*A's*", yet felt they hadn't learned very much. In many cases the first student possesses higher self-perceptions of efficacy because he has been put through the rigors that build self-confidence and higher self-perceptions. A follow-up study on how the extent to which high self-perceptions in French communicative activities guarantee high achievement would be an intriguing and worthwhile supplement to Steele and Aronson's work.

A comparison of a similar sized coeducational private school and single-sex private school would be of interest as well, to determine to what degree the highly

academic culture of the Patrick School was resultant of its single-sex versus coed status or its private school versus public school culture. Similarly, an elite private school coed class could be compared to a less exclusive private school coed class to help isolate the effect of school culture and ultimately answer the question of whether the real issue here is the single-sex versus coed environment, the private school versus public school, or simply the matter of school culture and its level of academic expectations.

In addition, a large, quantitative, randomized study would be useful in extracting some of the complicating factors discussed above as regards the effects of teacher quality, student gender composition, boys and their self-perceptions, and school culture. Although both sample sets spoke in clear terms about their respective environments, it should be acknowledged that as adolescents, they may find it difficult to cognitively assess complex systems of which they are a part, i.e., they may have been repeating "the party line" regarding their school setting without proper synthesis. Such a study would help to solve this issue as well.

Finally, researchers often talk of encountering surprises in their investigations, unanticipated findings or trails that lead down an unexpected path. One of the most interesting revelations that I encountered over the course of this research project was the discrepant definitions of education to which the boys from each school adhered. As discussed in Chapter Four, coed school boys and single-sex school boys appear to differ in their view of the role of education: whereas the Campbell School boys defined education more in social terms, their Patrick School counterparts saw it as an academic experience. The Campbell boys defended the coeducational system as better preparing them for working with women as adults, as being more similar to the "real world," and as

allowing more friendships. The Patrick boys defended their territory as an environment that was more conducive to concentrating on academics, plain and simple. Further research is necessary to determine if this condition does indeed exist, and if so, what the ramifications are and what if anything should be done to attend to the differences in how boys see the role of school. Do we overemphasize the role of school in socializing our young people, and at what cost? Do we trust the coed secondary school environment, with its potent adolescent culture, to properly undertake this task? This may be the study that brings full circle the issue of coeducation versus single-sex education: what was begun in order to ensure parity has derailed and diverted us from our goal of academic excellence toward a model where we socialize our youth not toward equality but toward a reinforcement of old stereotypes. Of all the follow-up studies recommended above, this is the most urgent.

Conclusion

This study sought to determine how boys see themselves as learners and speakers of French, and whether the single-sex or coed environment provides better opportunities for them to grow. With clarity of vision, honesty, understanding, compassion, and humor, the boys from both sample sets provided me with evidence that set in stark contrast the two learning environments. The coed model, wound tight with adolescent angst, the mating and dating game, and heightened self-consciousness due to the presence of girls, falls short of providing many boys a safe environment for risk-taking that leads to improved oral skills. The single-sex setting, far less charged yet more relaxed and forgiving of errors, represents a safe haven where boys can shed socio-cultural

constraints and achieve at high levels. Adolescents have a profound desire to learn, to attain proficiency in some skill, and to distinguish themselves. When such fortune is difficult to come by and obstacles are encountered, too often they choose to stand out in less agreeable ways. For boys in the coed French class, this obstacle is the many distractions of coeducation.

Appendix A

Student Name: _____

Questions for Students in Coed Setting

1) Are you a good student in French class? Do you have to work hard, or does it come easily?

2) What do you think of the class? Interesting? Boring? Are you learning a lot?

3) Do you feel that the teacher stresses the speaking skill in your class? How do you know?

4) Does your teacher relate better to the boys, the girls, or both evenly? Explain.

5) Do you think boys and girls learn better w/same sex teachers? How about you?

6) Why do you think so many French teachers are female (and so many physics teachers male)?

7) Are you glad you attend a coed school? Why? Are these the "right" reasons?

8) How would not having girls in your French class change things? Would it enhance learning or impede? How about *your* learning?

9) What are some advantages to having girls in class? Disadvantages?

10) How do you think the single-sex environment might benefit your self-perceptions as a speaker of French? How might it hurt them?

11) Are girls more verbal than boys? Are they better speakers, writers, w/better vocabularies? Boys and math/science?

12) What is your comfort level in your French class as compared to other classes? More, less, or average in comparison? Explain.

13) What does the typical FL "star" look like? Who is the best FL student in your class? Describe him/her.

14) What is the atmosphere in your class like? Any razzing, good-natured or otherwise? Do the high achievers who are male have to put up w/any sort of pressure? If so, do girls' presence amplify it or reduce it?

15) How might the single-sex environment change the atmosphere of your class? Would you feel more or less comfortable reciting a poem out loud in class, or talking about a reading girls present? Why?

16) How do you feel when a teacher hands back a test that you know you did poorly on? Would you feel the same, worse, or better without girls in the room?

17) Are there any classes or situations in school where a boy might prefer not to have girls present? Poetry class? Chorus/singing? Literature? This class? If so, why might this be?

18) How do you feel when your turn to provide information, give an opinion, or express feelings/emotions before the class is imminent? Would you feel more or less conscientious without girls present?

Appendix B

Student Name: _____

Questions for Students in Single-Sex Setting

1) Are you a good student in French class? Do you have to work hard, or does it come easily?

2) What do you think of the class? Interesting? Boring? Are you learning a lot? Why (not)?

3) What do you like/dislike about him?

4) Do you feel that the teacher stresses the speaking skill in your class? How do you know?

5) Do you think boys learn better w/male teachers or female? How about you?

6) Why do you think so many French teachers are female (and so many physics teachers male)?

7) Do you wish you had girls in this school? How about in your French class? Why (not)?

8) How would having girls in your French class change things? Would it enhance learning or impede it? How about *your* learning?

9) What are some advantages to having just boys in class?

10) Are girls more verbal than boys? Are they better speakers, writers, w/better vocabularies? Boys and math/science?

11) What would happen if ten girls were suddenly introduced into your FL class ***for good*** – what would some effects be? How would it affect your willingness or ability to speak French?

12) Would you be more or less likely to take an "on-task" risk such as reciting a poem out loud, or offering to talk about a reading?

13) In which environment would your ability to communicate in French needs be better served? Why do you think so?

14) What is your comfort level in your French class as compared to other classes? More, less, or average in comparison?

15) What is the atmosphere in your FL class like? Any razzing, good-natured or otherwise? Do the high achievers have to put up w/any sort of pressure? If so, would girls' presence amplify it or reduce it?

16) How do you feel when a teacher hands back a test that you know you did poorly on? Would you feel the same, worse, or better w/girls in the room?

17) How do you feel when your turn to provide information, give an opinion, or express feelings/emotions before the class is imminent? Would you feel more or less conscientious with girls present?

Appendix C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Dear _____ (student)

_____ (parent)

Introduction:

You have been invited to take part in a research study about your experiences as a French language student in your school. The study is called "The role of single-sex and coeducational instruction on boys' attitudes and self-perceptions of competence in French language communicative activities." You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a male French language student. You will be one of twenty-four students: twelve from a coeducational institution, and twelve from an all-boys school.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will have no effect on your grades or your academic standing. Please feel free to ask questions at any point if you do not understand.

The person doing this study is Cortland A. Mathers Jr., a former foreign language teacher at Campbell High School and a doctoral student at Boston College. He is being guided by Dr. Diana Pullin at Boston College's Lynch School of Education. No funding has been received for this study, and neither Mr. Mathers nor Dr. Pullin expects to receive any extra money from companies because of this study.

Purpose:

By doing this study we hope to learn about your impressions of your learning environment, either single-sex or coed, and its effect on how you see yourself as a French language learner.

Procedures:

The research will be done at The Campbell High School near Boston, MA and The Patrick High School near Worcester, MA and will involve:

- Classroom observations of participants wherein the researcher will look for classroom evidence of student self-perceptions to be discussed in the interviews.

The research will also involve:

- A one-on-one interview of no more than one hour with the researcher in a quiet location. During this interview, you will be asked questions about your French language learning experience and how the instructional environment affects it. Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed.

Throughout the course of this study, your participation will be strictly confidential, and your identity undisclosed. Fictitious names for you and your school will be used to maintain anonymity.

Risks:

To the best of our knowledge, the things that you will discuss in this study represent no risk or harm to you.

Benefits:

It is our hope that you will be able to gain some insight on yourself as a learner, how your instructional environment influences your learning, and what type of learning environment suits you.

Costs:

There is no cost to participating in this research study.

Compensation:

You will receive a $25 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble bookstore.

Withdrawal from the study:

You may choose to stop participation in this study at any time. Your decision to cease participation will have no effect on your grades or academic standing.

Confidentiality:

Your name will not be used in reporting any of your comments, so your answers will be anonymous. This means that no one other than Mr. Mathers will know that the answers came from you. This informed consent document, with your name on it, will be stored in a locked cabinet in Mr. Mathers' office at home, and only he will have access to the cabinet. The informed consent documents will be destroyed by shredding three years after the results of the study are published, and the tapes of each interview will be erased once they have been transcribed. The anonymous transcripts will be kept for future research and might be shared with other researchers.

Although it happens very rarely, we may be required to show information that identifies you, like this informed consent document, to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly. These would be people from a group such as the Boston College Review Board that oversees research involving human participants.

The information received from your and others' interviews will be analyzed. When the study is written or spoken about in my dissertation, at meetings, or in journals, your comments will be combined with those of other participants and identified with a fictitious name.

Questions:

You are encouraged to ask questions now and at any point during the study. You can reach me, Cortland Mathers, at (781) 373-5481 or Dr. Pullin at pullin@bc.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, please contact the Boston College Office of Research Compliance and Intellectual Property Management, (617) 552-3345.

Certification:

I have read and I believe I understand this Informed Consent document. I believe I understand the purpose of the research project and what I will be asked to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered satisfactorily.

I understand that I may stop my participation in this research study at anytime and that I can refuse to answer any question(s).

I understand that my name will not appear on the transcribed tapes of the interviews, and that I will not be identified in the reports of this research.

I received a signed copy of this Informed Consent document for my personal reference.

I hereby give my informed and free consent to be a participant in this study.

Signatures:

_____ _____

Date **Consent signature of participant**

_____

Print name of participant

_____

Consent signature of parent/guardian

Appendix D

Consent For Research

To: Principal, Patrick High School

From: Cortland Mathers

Re: The role of single-sex and coeducational instruction on boys' attitudes and self-perceptions of competence in French language communicative activities

As a former Romance language teacher at the secondary level and now a school administrator, I am deeply interested in circumstances that enhance the learning experience for all district students. My research has led me to believe that the instructional environment (i.e. single-sex vs. coeducational) may have considerable import on how boys perceive themselves as language learners, which may in turn affect their achievement. I plan therefore to investigate this issue as part of a doctoral dissertation.

To begin this project, I would like to observe French classes in search of classroom evidence of student self-perceptions, after which I would like to invite 12 French students to be interviewed individually by me. Since I recognize that free time for young people is at a premium and I do not want to interrupt classes, individual interviews will last for half an hour to 45 minutes and will be scheduled during the participant's free time and at their convenience. Some students may even prefer to conduct the interview outside of school. I will explain to the students that their participation is entirely voluntary, that no confidential information will be shared, and that there are no "right" answers. The parents of under-aged students will be asked to co-sign consent forms. Older students will be asked to sign their own consent forms.

When the study is completed, I would be delighted to share the results with you and the participants if you are interested. My hope is that with your help, the results of this study will make a contribution to the general body of knowledge of foreign language pedagogy. I give my sincere thanks in advance for your help in this project.

I have read the above project description and agree to have students in my school participate in this study providing that their parents give written consent.

_____ Date_____

Principal, Patrick High School

Consent For Research

To: Campbell High School Principal

From: Cortland Mathers

Re: The role of single-sex and coeducational instruction on boys' attitudes and self-perceptions of competence in French language communicative activities

As a former Romance language teacher at the secondary level, I am deeply interested in circumstances that enhance the learning experience for all students. My research has led me to believe that the instructional environment may have considerable import on how boys perceive themselves as language learners, which may in turn affect their achievement. I plan therefore to investigate this issue as part of a doctoral dissertation.

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I have read the above project description and agree to have students in my school participate in this study providing that their parents give written consent.

_____ Date_____

Principal, Campbell High School

Appendix E

Phase One Observation Matrix and Checklists

A. Matrix for Initial Classroom Observation

1) Class engages in conversation in the target language providing/obtaining information, expressing feelings or emotions in paired speaking/small groups for the following number of minutes per class:

	Class A	Class B
a. 1-3 (paired)/3-5 (small group)	_____	_____
b. 4-6/6-8	_____	_____
c. 7-9/9-11	_____	_____
d. 10 +/12 +	_____	_____

2) The instructor provides feedback on improving interpersonal language skills (e.g. accent, pronunciation, language structure/grammar, vocabulary):

	Class A	Class B
a. never	_____	_____
b. rarely	_____	_____
c. sometimes	_____	_____
d. often	_____	_____

3) Students engage in conversation in the target language providing/obtaining information, expressing feelings or emotions with the teacher and/or with other students before the entire class:

	Class A	Class B
a. never	_____	_____
b. rarely	_____	_____
c. sometimes	_____	_____
d. often	_____	_____

4) The teacher feels that s/he has clearly indicated to the students that achievement in the communicative activities of the course is central to overall success in the course:

	Class A	Class B
a. agrees strongly	_____	_____
b. agrees	_____	_____
c. is unsure	_____	_____
d. disagrees	_____	_____

5) Class size is: _____ _____

B. Student Progress Indicator Checklist

Student Gender	Discuss Readings	Share Opinions	Initiates Exchange	Contributes to Exchange
M				
F				

Comments

C. Teacher Feedback on Vocab/Grammar/Pronunciation

Immediate/Interrupted: _____

_____

Delayed: _____

_____

Immediate/Unobtrusive: _____

_____

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