FREEDOM, AGENCY, AND OPTIMISM:
A FEMINIST CASE STUDY ON GIRLS’ EDUCATION
IN SOUTHEASTERN TURKEY

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College
of Education, Health and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Rachel Anderson

August 2016
A dissertation written by

Rachel Anderson

A.B., Stanford University, 1989
M.A., Saint Mary’s College of California, 1997
Ph.D., Kent State University, 2016

Approved by

________________________________, Director, Doctoral Dissertation Committee

Vilma Seeberg

________________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee

Tricia Niesz

________________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee

Kenneth Cushner

Accepted by

________________________________, Director, School of Foundations, Leadership and Administration

Kimberly S. Schimmel

________________________________, Interim Dean, College of Education, Health and Human Services

Mark A. Kretovics
This feminist qualitative case study addressed the problem of understanding the role of girls’ education through the perspective of girls in southeastern Turkey. The study focused on what they believe they will gain from school, how school empowers their lives, and the social, cultural, and gendered dimensions of their experience in school.

The findings include: (a) girls want the freedom to pursue whatever potential their hearts desire; (b) they wish to help other girls achieve dreams; and (c) they believe that their communities can be improved. The girls not only understand that education can bring them a better life, but also understand the need for all girls in Turkey to be educated so they can pursue their own potential and contribute to the betterment of their communities and their country.

This study underlines the need for research to ask girls about their goals and interest in school. Additionally, the implications for community action at the local and national level are to provide access for more girls to become involved in civil society monitoring groups, new school planning committees, and retention initiatives in middle and high schools. Policy implications for international organizations include scaling up compulsory high school educational opportunities.
DEDICATION

To girls.

To my girls. To your girls. To OUR girls.

To girls who are in school and out of school, around the world.

To women who were girls, dreaming.

To women who need a second chance for an education.

To all girls who have an education, want an education, and missed an education.

This study is about and for you, girls.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my family in appreciation for all of the hours I missed with them while pursuing my doctorate. Thank you, Janae, Joelle, and Noah Anderson, my wonderful children, who patiently waited for me, loved me, and stayed quiet for me. Most of my doctoral work was conducted as a single parent and my children were my inspirations. Thank you for your support and encouragement, Dr. Richard Flecksteiner, my second chance at love and my husband. I promised you I was working on my doctoral degree when we met; thanks for helping me finish.

I could not have dreamed of completing my terminal degree without the mutual love and admiration of my parents, Ernest and Audray Wiesen. My parents are super heroes and they provided the foundation for a wonderful education, career, and family life. On several occasions, they also graciously provided a safe haven for my children while I was in Turkey. Many thanks to my patient employers at Kent State University and Cuyahoga Community College for allowing me the time and space to research, ruminate, and write.

So many frustrating setbacks, delays, and hurdles were overcome with the tireless help of my adviser and dissertation director, Dr. Vilma Seeberg. I might be her longest dissertation project yet. Special thanks to my editor and guide, Linda Meixner. Both Dr. V. and Ms. Meixner have the patience and tolerance of Job. Thank you, Drs. Niesz and Cushner; your expertise, kindness, and patience helped me reach my goals. Dr. Niesz introduced me to qualitative research and inspired me to explore the beauty of ethnography. Dr. Cushner is the only one on my committee who truly understands the
meaning and extent of meat and spices in southeastern Turkish cuisine. My introduction to Turkey was made possible by Dr. Linda Robertson and Sibel Cayir. They provided a long lasting opportunity for scholarship, friendship, and adventure. Mashallah!

My deepest gratitude to my friends, colleagues, and participants who live in Turkey. With their amazing hospitality, insight, and skills this undertaking would have failed. Sag Olun!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................ iv  

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................................................... v  

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................... x  

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1  
   Overview of the Problem .................................................................................. 1  
   Need for the Study ......................................................................................... 3  
   Perspective of the Study ............................................................................... 4  
   Research Questions ....................................................................................... 5  
   Limitations ...................................................................................................... 7  
   Significance of the Study .............................................................................. 8  
   Terminology .................................................................................................... 8  

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ...................................................................................... 10  
   Women, Politics, and Islam ............................................................................ 10  
      Women ........................................................................................................ 11  
      Politics ........................................................................................................ 12  
      The Example of Turkey ............................................................................. 16  
   The Human Development Capability Approach ......................................... 19  
      Modern Antipoverty Discourse ................................................................. 19  
      Challenges to Antipoverty Discourse ......................................................... 22  
      Beyond Economic Development, the Capability-Empowerment Perspective ................................................................................................................................. 25  
      Feminist Ethnographic Perspective ............................................................ 29  
   Girls to School Research ............................................................................... 33  
   Summary and Conclusion ............................................................................ 35  

III. DESIGN AND PROCEDURE ........................................................................ 37  
   Research Approach ....................................................................................... 37  
   Southeastern Turkey ....................................................................................... 39  
   Research Procedure and Time Table ............................................................. 41  
   Phase 1: 2009 .................................................................................................. 42  
   Phase 2: 2010 .................................................................................................. 45  
   Participants ..................................................................................................... 46  
      Officials and Community Participants ......................................................... 47  
      Girls and Their Mothers ............................................................................ 49  

vii
Data Collection .................................................................................................................. 49
Triangulated Sources ......................................................................................................... 50
Interviewing .......................................................................................................................... 51
Observations .......................................................................................................................... 52
Field Notes .......................................................................................................................... 55
Language and Translation ................................................................................................. 56
Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 57
Open Coding Categories ...................................................................................................... 58
Focus Coding ....................................................................................................................... 61
Researcher Roles and Ethics ............................................................................................... 62
Reliability and Validity ......................................................................................................... 64

IV. FINDINGS......................................................................................................................... 66
What I Learned From My 360-Degree Observations ......................................................... 66
Findings by Research Question and Themes ..................................................................... 69
Research Question 1 ........................................................................................................... 69
Research Question 2 ........................................................................................................... 72
Research Question 3 ........................................................................................................... 75
Focused Coding Themes .................................................................................................... 82
Individual Aspirations and Achievements—Girls’ Voices ................................................. 82
Finding a Better Life for Families—Mothers’ Voices ......................................................... 83
Human Rights and Education for Communities—Officials’ Voices ................................. 83
Summary of the Themes ..................................................................................................... 84

V. DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS ............................. 87
Confidence in Findings as it Applies to Research Questions 1-3 ...................................... 87
Discussion of Findings by Research Question .................................................................. 89
Research Question 1: What Do Girls in Southeastern Turkey Think They Will Gain From School? .............................................................................................................. 89
Research Question 2: How Has School Empowered the Girls in Southeastern Turkey? ....................................................................................................................... 93
Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 100
Recommendations for Future Research .......................................................................... 100
Implications for the Field of Girls’ Education Initiatives and Policy .......................... 104
Epilogue .............................................................................................................................. 106

APPENDICES ..................................................................................................................... 107
APPENDIX A. MAPS OF TURKEY (RESEARCH FIELD) ............................................. 108
APPENDIX B. AUDIO CONSENT ...................................................................................... 112
APPENDIX C. IRB APPROVAL ....................................................................................... 114
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ........................................................................... 116
APPENDIX E. GAP VILLAGE PHOTOS ............................................................................ 118
LIST OF TABLES

Table | Page
--- | ---
1. Time Table of Research Related Data Collection 2004–2010+ | 43
2. Officials and Community Participants in Sulemaniya, July 24, 2009 | 45
3. Girls and Their Mothers in Sulemaniya, June and July 2010 | 48
4. School Visits | 53
5. Observations of Cultural Context | 54
6. Open Codes | 59
7. Focus Codes | 61
8. Research Question 1 Findings | 70
9. Research Question 2 Findings | 73
10. Research Question 3 Social Dimensions | 76
11. Research Question 3 Cultural Dimensions | 78
12. Research Question 3 Gendered Dimensions | 78
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Problem

During the first decade of the 21st century, multiple United Nations (UN) agencies, including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), launched robust girls-to-school campaigns in connection with World Bank funding, national governments, and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to increase dramatically girls’ participation in school. In 2000, the UN Secretary-General launched UNGEI to assist national governments in bringing parity and equality to all children, girls and boys alike. Turkey, identified as a middle income country with varying levels of development between the urban centers of the northern and western parts of the state, initiated numerous girls-to-school campaigns (2001–2005), concentrated primarily on the less developed and struggling southeastern and eastern provinces or the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) region of the nation (Appendix A). In this region, culture, politics, and tradition have proven to be challenging barriers to girls’ enrollment in and completion of school.

In many ways Turkey serves as a potential model for its sister Middle Eastern nations in its unwavering support for democracy in a predominantly Islam-practicing state. Little has been written in English about girls’ education in developing countries in the Middle East and North African (MENA) outside Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan. That literature has been limited by number or confined to NGO or UN projects. Leaders in the
countries rapidly evolving following the Arab Spring (2010–2013) must evaluate the benefits of democracy, including the need for girls and women to participate fully in the development of new eras in those countries.

Although modern Turkey may be seen as a beacon of hope and development compared to many of its MENA neighbors when it comes to balancing Muslim tradition and secular politics and legal statutes, some challenging barriers remain for many women and girls in the southern and eastern developing regions of the country. In January 2007, the Education Reform Initiative (ERI) published a report entitled *The Window of Opportunity Awaiting Turkey: Demographics, Education and New Perspectives Towards 2025*. This report confirmed the disparity between girls and boys in schools:

When the schooling levels in primary and secondary schooling levels are observed in accordance with gender based criterion, it is seen that:

- When the schooling levels are taken into consideration, the male-female discrepancy is evident. The net schooling levels of girls are lagging behind the boys in every way.

- The schooling levels of girls are increasing, however inadequately. As the education time span lengthens, the schooling rate of girls is decreasing. (p. 18)

The writers of the initiative referred to the increased number of compulsory years of schooling mandated by the state from five to eight in 1997. The longer children are expected to stay in school, the greater the resistance from families to send girls.

Unfortunately, the historically slow pace of improvement for Primary Enrollment Rates (Appendix I) in the Middle East presents a staggering debt to overcome.
Documenting, describing, and providing understanding of the lived experiences of girls in southeastern Turkey, this qualitative case study was designed to reveal the progress and challenges girls experienced as they sought education and empowerment in one southeastern province. Through field observations and interviews, the study captures the thoughts and experiences of girls who are in school and the cultural context of these experiences. Gathering information from officials, parents, and others in the community provides more depth to the study by exposing the possible congruence or incongruence between the girls and influential people around them. The study creates understanding of the girls’ experiences by juxtaposing a review of the literature with the analysis of the findings yielded in the study.

This research study hopes to contribute to a small but growing body of literature on the topic of empowerment via girls-to-school initiatives (Adely, 2004; Fischman, 2004; Greany, 2008; Kong, Oomen, & Patino, 2002; Seeberg, 2006, 2007, 2011; Sharkey, 2008; Stromquist, 2001; Unterhalter, 2007). The qualitative nature of this research has provided a unique and important contribution to the existing literature by representing the voices of local participants. It expanded the current literature in English by including voices of girls who lived in Turkey.

**Need for the Study**

As of this writing, no English language qualitative research had been published with regard to the impact of girls-to-school initiatives in southeastern Turkey. Several reports from NGOs and international organizations have been published, but few have provided the perspectives of the girls nor a feminist perspective. This study was designed...
to fill the gap in the literature; furthermore, the development of girls’ education in southeastern Turkey is relevant to other predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia.

**Perspective of the Study**

This research was influenced primarily by the constructs of feminism. The approach entailed continuous examination of the position I as the researcher took in relationship to the participants of the study. In fact, “the attention to and concern about relationships with subjects—including concerns about issues of reciprocity, representation, and voice—is uniquely feminist” (Pillow & Mayo, 2007). Attention not only to relationships but also to the manner in which they were described in writing was an important aspect of this study. In addition, making a contribution to the research location or community (either as an extra pair of hands in the school or community centers or as a colleague lending ideas based on relevant experience and expertise in education) was part of my goals for this study.

The Human Development Capability Approach, which derived from a very simple question: What are people actually able to do and to be? (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 212), provided a modern perspective linked to the examination of participants’ viewpoint about the things they have reason to value. Much like feminist researchers, capability researchers ask questions that reach beyond economic development or gross national product (GNP) per capita and delve into the values and desires of people. Sen (1999) and Nussbaum worked during the first decade of the 21st century together and with other
scholars to create the Human Development and Capability Association in order to draw attention to and improve work in the capabilities approach to global human development.

**Research Questions**

The research goals of this study were based on the preparation and findings of a two-phase study conducted in July 2009 and June 2010. In the 2009 visit, research was conducted to explore the meaning “girls-to-school initiatives” had for communities in southeastern Turkey. The GAP region had been receiving messages and support for girls’ education through a national gender parity campaign called Haydi Kizlar Okula! or Let’s Go to School Girls! The basic two research questions were as follows:

1. What did girls gain from Haydi Kizlar Okula (HKO)?
2. What did communities gain from HKO?

Answers to these questions were explored through semi-structured interviews conducted with the assistance of interpreters. Participants in this early phase of the study included men and women, leaders in one province in southeast Turkey who had served in a civil monitoring group for a girls’ education initiative. In the initial assessment of this phase of the data, certain dimensions of empowerment and agency emerged from the statements made by the girls and by members of the community.

The next step in the two-part study was to explore further the imagined capabilities of girls in the same province. In other words I aimed to hear the girls who participated in an HKO effort to describe what an educated life might bring to them and how they envisioned achieving their own destiny. Extended time spent in the GAP region in Summer 2010 yielded data suggesting that girls had gained many aspects of the
dimensions outlined in Seeberg’s (2011) Capabilities and Empowerment Framework. Girls and mothers participated in interviews at that time so that the researcher could evaluate the voices and opinions of the girls and determine how they experienced change (Kabeer, 1999) in their well-being, agency, freedom, and achievement of valued functionings or lifestyles (Seeberg, 2007, 2011; Sen, 1999) as a result of participating in girls-to-school initiatives in southeastern Turkey. This research study, which analyzes the data from both phases, addressed the research questions that follow:

1. What did girls in Southeastern Turkey think they will gain from school?
2. How did school empower the girls in southeastern Turkey?
3. What were the social, cultural, and gendered dimensions of girls’ experience in school?

These research questions were designed to allow readers to understand the context of southeastern Turkish girls’ experiences in schooling on the border of Syria, uncover the change or transformative aspects possible as a result of their education, and hear rich descriptions emanating from the voices of girls in developing Turkey.

This study about the aspirations and gains of girls in developing Turkey hopes to build a platform from which to inform future educational programs and policies aimed at improving the lives of girls in developing regions through education. Hearing and representing stories and dreams from a sample of these young girls may offer clues and may lead to additional research and improved educational action.
Limitations

The limitations of the study resulted from issues of self-reporting, reluctance of interviewees, and cultural and language considerations of girls-to-school initiatives in Turkey. I did not live in Turkey for more than a few weeks at a time. Therefore verifying the participants’ statements about their experiences was not possible. The limitation of self-reported information means that internal or external influences could change the natural responses of the study participants. Maybe the girls wanted to impress the researcher? Maybe the girls lied about their aspirations? One mitigating factor to this limitation was the congruence between what all three categories of participants shared. The girls, mothers, and officials stated similar concepts.

Some of the individual officials approached for an interview were reluctant to participate in the study “on the record.” A few people interviewed would only speak with me without being recorded or referenced. This narrowed the number of interviewees available for data analysis. However, the “off the record” knowledge gathered could be discussed in my journal notations and used to inform emerging aspects of the research.

The researcher is neither Turkish nor Kurdish; therefore the use of qualified interpreters was imperative to translate the words of the participants into the English language so that their voices could be heard by a broad audience. Having direct conversations, using a common language and cultural experiences, would be ideal. Therefore, using an interpreter was a possible limitation of the study. However, careful attention was given to matching participants’ words with other cultural cues gained during the research.
Significance of the Study

The findings in this study contribute to a limited body of work in English about girls-to-school initiatives in Turkey. This research has the potential to improve and influence the methods of implementing change that makes girls’ education more relevant in developing regions where parity with boys is not being achieved. This research hopes to illustrate the contributions girls are aspiring to make in their own communities after they complete secondary education (or higher).

The use of the Human Development Capability Approach promotes an emerging perspective in the burgeoning field of girls to school research and the use of qualitative case studies makes possible the growing production of knowledge around the individual and collective desires and values of people in development research. Coupled with feminist research goals, this research offers a promising opportunity to not only hear the voices of girls in southeastern Turkey, but to also understand and evaluate their impact and implications for development.

Terminology

The term “Western” is used in this study to describe European or North American influences versus Asian, African, Middle Eastern, South American influences.

“GAP” is an acronym for Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi, meaning the Great Anatolian Project in Turkish. This Turkish development project is described in Chapter 3 and also provides a geographical reference to a set of nine Turkish provinces lining the border of Iraq and Syria.
MENA is an acronym for Middle East and North Africa. Countries commonly included in the geographical reference include those extending from Morocco to Iran. Additionally, Turkey is often included in this list as well.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review has been divided into four sections to provide the reader with background on the complex nature of the location of the research as well as the theoretical framework for this study. First, in the section, Women, Politics, and Islam, the researcher introduces scholarly background on how women experience gendered inequality in regions of the world that are predominantly Muslim. The second section, entitled Theoretical Framework of the Human Development Capability Approach, includes the contributions of scholars, such as Sen, Nussbaum, and Seeberg, who have investigated the value individuals place on their desires, achievements, and contributions to society and called into question the economics-only development models predominantly used in international development and policy planning across the world. The third section of the literature review entitled Feminist Ethnographic Research describes the value and benefits of the type of research influencing this dissertation. The final section of the literature review, Girls to School Research, covers the relatively new contributions of research designed to investigate the results of improved access to education for girls in developing regions.

Women, Politics, and Islam

This section reviews the challenges of women living in MENA and Turkey. First the review addresses the overall disparity of women in these regions. Then the political challenges women face in MENA countries are presented. Finally, the research relates these conditions to the country of Turkey in order to set the stage for this case study.
Women

In many regions of the world, women are left uneducated, unemployed, or unheard with respect to daily lived experiences. The researcher drew from the work of feminist scholars who have addressed the unique cultural, religious, and gender issues encountered by women in nations whose predominant religion is Islam. In “a recent report by the World Economic Forum (2005) [its authors] argued that countries that do not fully take advantage of half of the talent in their populations are misallocating human resources” (Moghadam, 2009, p. 9). A compelling report for UNESCO described the continuing struggle of women and girls in MENA and adjacent countries, where the practice of Islam dominates (e.g., Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan), but gender discrimination is “hardly specific to the Middle East” (Moghadam, 2009, p. 10) because it has been observed in all corners of the world, including the West and specifically the United States. For instance, at the time of this writing, women earned 77 cents in the United States in comparison to the dollar earned by men (Bennett & Ellison, 2010).

The gap between men’s and women’s rights is most visible in MENA countries, where there is greater resistance to closing it. The resistance stems in large part from the distinctive way in which MENA countries have institutionalized gender discrimination, subjecting MENA women to legal forms of discrimination in addition to patriarchal attitudes and practices. (Moghadam, 2009, p. 10)

Women’s rights, equity and parity are issues relevant across the globe and certainly in nations whose predominant religion is Islam.
Politics

With the exception of Turkey and Tunisia, where family law is drawn primarily from secular sources, family law in MENA countries is based on Sharia (religious law from 2nd and 3rd centuries), which differentiates between men and women in the allocation of rights and responsibilities and typically places women in the position of minors and dependents (An-Naim, 2002). Women and girls are placed in the guardianship of male relatives and must acquire permission to marry, seek employment, start a business, travel, or open a bank account for a child (Moghadam, 2009). By 21st-century Western standards these practices seem harsh and discriminatory; however, when they were established in the 11th century, they were deemed quite progressive (Moghadam, 2009).

Numerous examples across MENA and Asia can be cited to demonstrate the continued uphill battle women face in obtaining rights to make decisions or to have access to economic independence and education. One such example is a law enacted in 2011 in Egypt, allowing women the right to divorce only if they forfeit their financial rights. This law is “especially hard on low-income women or those without any employment experience” (Moghadam, 2009, p. 11). Violence erupted against young girls striving for education in the case of Malala Yousafzai from Swat Valley, Pakistan. She and her father fought for girls’ right to education. Yousafzai wrote a blog that eventually put her life in jeopardy. She was shot in the head and neck in 2012 by conservative Islamists associated with the Taliban. She recovered and moved to safety in the United Kingdom and has inspired people across the globe when she won the Nobel Peace Prize.
in 2014 (Yousafzai, 2013). Numerous additional examples emanate from a variety of countries, where the disenfranchisement of women and often the more conservative interpretations of Islam have remained in place not only to make women doubt the efficacy of Western development efforts but also to keep them misinformed about the interpretation of the Qu’ran.

Hashim (1999) asserted that development experts and scholars must understand the influence of religion in a developing region:

Development practitioners [must] take into consideration the relevance of local beliefs . . . From this perspective, it is important that development practitioners and/or feminists address Islam, not only to avoid inappropriate interventions which might alienate the communities in which they work but also to be aware of existing social structures and norms which might promote more effective implementation. (p. 8)

Hashim (1999) recommended that development experts take note of the religious contexts in which they practice and then to use this understanding to increase their effectiveness. Cross-cultural understanding is imperative in order for development projects to address the needs of local women effectively and to apply feminist principles in a sensitive manner. She addressed the urgency of helping women who may not have literacy skills or a clear understanding of their own religion. According to Hashim (1999), the goal of development work is not to change women’s beliefs but to offer options in their lived experiences by expanding interpretations of the Qur’an.
Women in developing regions often labor to achieve parity in literacy levels with their male counterparts. “Given their levels of illiteracy, particularly women’s illiteracy, and the fact that the Qur’an is often still read in Arabic, poor Muslims are particularly vulnerable to this kind of manipulation” (Hashim, 1999, p. 9).

The struggle to reduce illiteracy in the MENA region has remained ongoing. According to information from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, between 2005 and 2008, the regional literacy rate among adult males in Arab states was 81.2%, but the rate for females was 63.1%; furthermore, the regional youth literacy rate for males was 91.0% and 83.7% for females. Researchers and development practitioners in MENA and Turkic regions must be informed about the intersection between Islam and literacy when working with gender issues. Illiteracy has presented challenges to feminist activists who have attempted to provide information about human rights that is sensitive to religion and education levels. Hashim (1999) and Moghadam (2009) have directed attention to the impact the variety of interpretations and contexts in the Qur’an have on women in MENA.

According to Hashim (1999), four verses in the Qur’an are used to justify veiling, also called purdah, which means seclusion; yet considerable variation in interpretation has resulted in the differing degrees to which veiling has actually been practiced. Consequently, the influence of legal and political agendas on laws and spiritual guidelines appears to be manipulated by those in power. Hashim challenged development practitioners to help women access the texts in the Qur’an and decide for themselves the appropriate interpretation or at the very least understand that a variety of
possibilities are available to women in the Qur’an. For example, veiling has become an institutionalized aspect of Islam in many Muslim societies, which serves to illustrate both the importance of a knowledge of Qur’anic injunctions and the need to challenge patriarchal interpretations which are used as justification for practices which maintain an inequitable status quo (Hashim, 1999, p. 10). Hashim explained that allowing women to contest the interpretations of the Qur’an where it impacted women’s lives provided women the opportunity to gain some control over the legal decisions and policies in their communities. Hashim (1999) stated, “Although one might dismiss these arguments as an intellectual exercise with little practical use for women, feminist theologians are using these reinterpretations to challenge and amend civil legal codes” (p. 11). She argued that veiling has become a part of everyday life in MENA countries without feminist, women-driven, and women-centered scrutiny to challenge the practice, its source, or its gender outcomes. Although this practice may indeed have created barriers for women and girls, she also foresees a future that may hold new scholarly information and opportunities for change.

Incorporating the study of rights accorded to women in Islam into the awareness-raising and educational components of development interventions could be very effective in improving women’s lives. Addressing these issues from within an Islamic perspective would prevent opportunistic accusations of cultural imperialism (intended to prevent feminism from entering an Islam culture), and would be more likely to appeal to Muslim women. (Hashim, 1999, p. 12)
Real, concrete change has been effected in the lives of Moroccan women (Moghadam, 2009). In October 2003 after years of effort by women’s rights organizations, the king of Morocco announced a new family code, which he asserted was consistent with the spirit of the Sharia. The new code has been heralded as a great leap forward in the rights of both women and children.

The Moroccan case is a striking example of how women’s rights advocates can build coalition to generate social dialogue, launch key policy debates, help reform laws and change public policy. Morocco now joins Tunisia and Turkey as the only countries in the MENA region where the husband and wife share responsibility for the family. (Moghadam, 2009, p. 14)

Moghadam (2009) showcased a recent success in promoting human rights for women in MENA nations against a backdrop of challenges in the greater geographic region. Despite Turkey’s respected record in balancing democracy and Islamic forces among its NATO allies, serious cultural challenges have remained.

**The Example of Turkey**

Religious beliefs have influenced MENA politics and law; however, another important cultural factor has also resulted in barriers for women and girls to participate freely in civil society and education: the patriarchal family structure. A UN report entitled *Progress of Arab Women 2004* stated, “Many women have no option but to accept the patriarchal family structures that limit their ability to participate in both the economic and political realms” (UNIFEM, 2004, p. 3). Even in MENA countries where individuals practice Christianity, patriarchal families operate to subordinate girls and
women to second-class status and create formidable barriers to education, work, and freedom of movement in public spaces. Delaney (1991) documented an ethnographic study in a Turkish village, describing the point at which girls and boys enter puberty in one village. She talked about how boys grow into men via a process where they can promote their appearance, flaunt their sexuality, and experience additional freedoms. In contrast, girls grow into womanhood through the covering and shaming of their bodies and the limiting of their freedom to the confines of their parent’s home. Delaney even acknowledged that foreign women and city women are likened to prostitutes due to their modern appearance and ciplak (naked) clothing (Delaney, 1991).

Around the age of puberty MENA girls and boys become physically and socially separated. Gender roles are strictly monitored and consequences for deviation can be especially harsh or deadly (honor killings) for girls; “thus most women comply with and enforce rules of seclusion” (Delaney, 1991, p. 97). Adely (2004) also noted in her research on Jordanian girls in middle school the limited social spaces in which they may operate. Adely said, “for the vast majority of adolescent girls I spoke with, school was typically the only place they were allowed to go” (p. 358).

Adely (2004) described the gender experiences of girls and the benefits of schooling, demonstrating the cultural separation girls experience in MENA and the opportunity schooling presents in opposition to the patriarchal culture, but the influence of fathers’ beliefs often curtails the education of girls at the onset of puberty. Turkey’s strictly secular laws prohibit girls and young women from wearing the headscarf in public schools and government buildings; thus, this law has posed a confounding
predicament for fathers who wish to protect the honor of their daughters. Many fathers have resisted sending their rural or village girls to school because those who “willfully permitted their teen-age daughters to be bareheaded [açık] . . . not only were thought to be Communists but were considered to be sending their daughters into prostitution” (Delaney, 1991, p. 91).

In addition the plight of migrant and rural Turkish women has been documented in a 1994 report entitled *Women’s Status in the GAP Region* by the Development Foundation of Turkey. This report describes the lives lived by numerous women in the eastern two thirds of the country as well as urban migrant women. Fifty-five percent of the women were between 16 and 20 years old at the time of marriage, and an additional 37% were under the age of 15 at the time of marriage. Among rural women in the GAP region, 67% were illiterate at the time of the publication, and 64% had more than one specific health complaint. Women cited daily work burdens and economic hardships at the top of their list of barriers that constrained their daily lives (Development Foundation, 1994). In addition, the report stated that lack of transportation and distance between small villages and urban facilities (even small town facilities) prevented women from congregating, networking, and receiving basic assistance. Women and girls in Turkey are protected by many secular laws; however, they are still subject to the patriarchal family structure that limits their mobility and access to education and other important resources for daily living. The influences of Turkish culture, religion, and gender were important features in the lives of the research participants.
The above authors’ contributions to this research are important because they set the cultural context for the palpable resistance conservative, developing regions of Turkey and other MENA countries project onto the dreams and desires of girls who wish to attend school. This context provides an important background to the comments the girls provided during their interviews. The ensuing analysis of the girls’ quotes has been informed by these authors’ research on the women, politics, and Islamic contexts in southeastern Turkey.

**The Human Development Capability Approach**

The body of research on girls’ education to which the current study belongs, has focused on the empowering, transforming effects education can generate in girls, families, and communities within the bounds of existing constraints. The emphasis has been on the empowering changes girls experienced and generated as a result of “being and doing” education, not on the economic output that would result from increased participation by girls. First this section traces the history of how women in poverty were described through the modern anti-poverty discourse of the 1970s and 1980s. Then a description of the challenges to those theories is discussed and the resulting move toward the human capability approach that emerged from the work of Amartya Sen at the turn of the 21st century.

**Modern Antipoverty Discourse**

Women and girls became the intentional subjects of research, policy, and economic development agendas only in recent history. During the 1950s and 1960s, development theorists typically ignored the contributions or nuanced situations of women
and girls. A separate literature on women in development (WID) emerged in the 1970s to help make women visible in the development process (Tickner, 2002). The WID program in Africa emphasized women’s active productive contribution to development. [Program administrators] used arguments of their economic efficiency to divert scarce resources to women. In doing so [they] focused on what women did for development, rather than what it did for them. WID is associated with development projects aimed at women only, especially income-generation projects. (Heward, 1999, p. 1)

This approach encouraged aid workers to ignore the relationships between men and women and focus all the successes and failures of development projects for women on women. In the 1980s emphasis shifted to an understanding of gender relations and how they impacted women’s lives. This perspective was labeled gender and development (GAD). By analyzing the relationships between men and women in a development context, GAD was accompanied by an acknowledgment of the discrete differences between men and women. Large international organizations, such as the Swedish Development Authority (SIDA), required all personnel and consultants “to attend a training course lasting three days to develop gender competence” (Swainson, Bendera, Gordon, & Kadzamira, 1998, p. 22). Unfortunately, a disconnect often occurred somewhere between the training and practice on the ground. A 1995 evaluation indicated that some SIDA staff remained “uncertain about the goals and intent of policy” (Swainson et al., 1998, p. 22). Fortunately, feminists continued to influence policy and
practice by creating a movement in the mid to late 1990s called gender mainstreaming. Gender models for economic development (and presumably other kinds of development) were introduced to “ensure that gender is central to macro-economic planning rather than marginalized in low-budget, women-only projects” (Heward, 1999, p. 3). Finally, issues of great importance for women could be addressed in the initiation of development projects, instead of rushed, unfunded afterthoughts.

Additional voices have also influenced current development theories. During the 1990s, authors of feminist literature in development emphasized local and particularized knowledge in which to challenge the hegemony of the West (Tickner, 2002). This perspective emerged from women in developing countries, regions, and communities, who challenged the notion that only the developer had answers for increasing productivity and literacy. Postcolonial scholars, postmodern scholars, and poststructural scholars contributed to this discourse on women’s and girls’ education and development.

“Poststructuralist thinkers raised critical questions about identity and show[ed] how the meaning of gender entails fluid and shifting processes of identification in tension with the fixed structures noted by GAD analysts” (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2006, p. 27). The most recent shift in discourse included the human development framework and the associated capabilities approach introduced by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000), who considered the definitions of the political foundation of the demand for gender equality and the right to education.
Challenges to Antipoverty Discourse

Development theorists have often assumed a deficit model in the sense that development agencies must notice a deficiency or problem that requires a solution. With regard to women’s and girls’ educational prospects, the data, tallied across the globe and in many countries and regions of the world, show considerable gaps and disparity between the genders in educational attainment and access. Gender gaps typically measured include the following: literacy rates, income and poverty rates, and access to education. Many of these gaps are exacerbated by poverty, ethnicity, rural location, and religion. Members of multinational organizations, such as the World Bank and the United Nations, are keenly interested in closing gender gaps. The United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 set two millennium development goals (MDGs) to address the problems:

MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education, with the target of ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015.

MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women, with the target of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels of education by 2015. (United Nations, 2005)

Some of the driving imperatives defined in quantitative research have shown a correlation between girls’ education and subsequent benefits for societies: lower crude birth rates, longer life expectancies, lower death rates of all sorts, improved provision of basic needs, and more rapid rates of economic growth (Hadden & London, 1996). These kinds of research studies have provided the standard evidence for developing increased
enrollment and persistence in schools for girls. Filmer (2005) used internationally comparable household data sets (demographic and health surveys) to investigate “how gender and wealth interact to generate within-country inequalities in educational enrollment and attainment, [noting that] that girls are at a great educational disadvantage in particular regions” (p. 357). Lewis and Lockheed (2006) recommended a global discussion on girls’ education and stimulated leadership for an action campaign. Their work is not a feminist text but a document written to give policy-makers a concise guidebook of “how to fix” the girls’ education dilemma. Lewis and Lockheed, however, failed to provide the kind of critique and evaluation that feminist scholars introduced.

Through the lens of feminists, the deeper layers of gendered challenges and opportunities in girls-to-school initiatives are visible.

The voices of women and girls cannot be heard in quantitative analysis of household data or cross-national, panel regression analysis; those voices can be heard in feminist research, which seeks to recognize the importance of women’s lived experiences with the goal of unearthing subjugated knowledge. Each perspective forges links between feminism and activism, between the academy and women’s everyday lives. Feminist perspectives also carry messages of empowerment that challenge the encircling of knowledge claims by those who occupy privileged positions. Feminist thinking and practice require taking steps from the “margins to the center” while eliminating boundaries of division that privilege dominant forms of
knowledge building, boundaries that mark who can be a knower and what can be known. (Hess-Biber & Brooks, 2007, p. 3)

Feminist researchers have explored the lived experiences of everyday women and girls and relay stories of agency. Some of the most influential comparative and international education (CIE) researchers studying and influencing policy and practice in girls’ and women’s education at the time of this writing include Aikman, de Jaegere, Molyneaux, Monkman, Nussbaum, Seeberg, Stambach, Stromquist, Unterhalter, and Walker. Many of these feminist scholars have called into question unjust gender practices and policies. Some have used the words of women’s lived experiences to provide rich descriptions of genuine experiences impacted by positive practice and policy that showcase the fulfillment of their potential or encourage hope for a better future. The above mentioned authors have shifted the dialogue about girls’ education from parity-based talk toward social justice and the rights-based ethics of care and respect. Aikman and Unterhalter (2006) stated:

Gender parity is a rather narrow aspiration. A focus on gender parity means measuring quantitative change and counting numbers of girls, as compared with the numbers of boys, enrolling in school. . . . [Instead] . . . we interpret gender equality in terms of respect for human rights and a set of ethical demands for securing the conditions for all people, men and women, to live a full life. (p. 3) Merely counting girls is insufficient; describing and evaluating the quality and impact of girls’ educational experiences is essential.
Beyond Economic Development, the Capability-Empowerment Perspective

According to Nussbaum (2009), “Countries and states are often focused on economic growth alone, but their people, meanwhile, are striving for something different: They want meaningful human lives” (p. 211). One of the emerging lines of inquiry in the first decade of the 21st century in girls’ and women’s education was the human development capability approach, which derived from a very simple question: What are people actually able to do and to be? (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 212). Much like feminist researchers, capability researchers ask questions that reach beyond economic development or gross national product (GNP) per capita and delve into the values and desires of people. Sen and Nussbaum worked during the first decade of the 21st century together and with other scholars to create the Human Development and Capability Association in order to draw attention to and improve work in the capabilities approach. A woman’s “capability” refers to the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for a person to achieve. Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations” (or less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles). (Sen, 1999, p. 75)

Sen (1999) argued that income and wealth are not the only measures by which people’s lives should be evaluated. Other less quantifiable concepts are worthy of evaluation and important when working in various regions of the world. With respect to evaluating girls’ education, Unterhalter (2007) stated that those who write evaluations should look at “the condition of being educated, the negative and positive freedoms that
sustain this condition and the ways in which being educated supports what each and every individual has reason to value” (p. 75).

Nussbaum (2000) created a controversial list of core capabilities, closely related to definitions of activism for social justice and rights-based approaches to development. In certain core areas of human functioning, a necessary condition of justice for a public political arrangement is that it deliver to citizens a certain basic level of capability. If people are systematically falling below the threshold in any of these core areas, this should be seen as a situation both unjust and tragic; in need of urgent attention—even if in other respects things are going well. (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 71)

At the top of her list is education, which is a form of capability because “it enhances the opportunities of all to choose what they wish to do or be” (Unterhalter, 2007, p. 79). Both Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) argued that basic education reduces human insecurity, and this has particularly powerful effects for women in widening their capabilities. Nussbaum made the case that gender equality in education has its own “intrinsic importance.” The remainder of her list includes the ability to (a) use imagination and thought, (b) develop emotional attachments and the freedom to sustain them, (c) develop a conception of the good through practical reason, (e) develop the basis of self-respect, (f) enjoy play, and (g) possess some sense of control of one’s environment.

Predictably, scholars have taken aim at the capability approach. One important critique outlined by Unterhalter is that “it evaluates opportunities, rather than outcomes”
(2007, p. 88). As a result of this criticism, an interesting possible line of inquiry has developed around the notion of empowerment. The 1995 Beijing Declaration directly values empowering women and girls; it ensures women’s equal access to economic resources, including land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communication and markets, as a means to further the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, including through the enhancement of their capacities to enjoy the benefits of equal access to these resources. (United Nations, 1995)

Not only are women and girls supposed to have access to the resources noted above, but they also are supposed to have the ability to enjoy their benefits. If scholars can identify what empowerment means to women and girls, then researchers can assess development projects in education to determine whether empowering benefits result from the studied educational initiatives.

Kabeer (2005) provided a conceptualization of empowerment:

One way of thinking about power is in terms of the ability to make choices. To be disempowered means to be denied choice, while empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails change. (p. 15)

The concept of empowerment can be explored through three closely interrelated dimensions: agency, resources, and achievements. Agency represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect. Hence, it is central to the concept of
empowerment. Resources are the medium through which agency is exercised, and achievements refer to the outcomes of agency (Kabeer, 2005).

Defining empowerment in this way creates a framework to move capabilities approaches beyond assessing opportunities and into evaluating outcomes or changes in the lives of women and girls. Kabeer (2005) provided further clarity by focusing on “the transformative forms of agency on the part of women and on those achievements that suggest a greater ability on the part of poor women to question, analyze, and act on the structures of patriarchal constraint in their lives” (p. 15).

After a development project commences in a region with abject poverty, scholars can determine whether women and girls are being empowered by the goals of the project. They can pursue lines of inquiry in which they ask questions such as the following: Do the behaviors of women or girls demonstrate a change in their agency to solve problems in their communities? Do girls push back on constraints in the household that prevent them from pursuing or persisting in school? Do mothers adjust household roles for daughters to go to school (Seeberg, 2007, 2011)?

In her contribution to empowerment discourse Seeberg and Luo (2011) described a framework that defines an empowerment-capabilities approach for future research and evaluation of practice in developing regions. In Seeberg’s (2011) framework she adapted three of Sen’s (1999) dimensions of freedom to constitute empowerment: (a) well-being, (b) agency, and (c) achievement of capabilities or aspirations that the individual has reason to value (p. 46). She evaluated the voices of girls in a remote mountain village in Western China through the analytical framework described above. Seeberg used her
empowerment-capabilities framework to describe, categorize, and evaluate the changes girls experience via education on their lived experiences and actions. Seeberg and Luo (2012) invoked in her research a valuable new dimension—habitus. This concept contributes a layer of reflection about the social location of the girls in her study.

Authors who have written about human capabilities and empowerment have provided an important avenue for the current researcher. The personal, developmental, and professional gains girls strive for and achieve can be described as gains instead of solutions to a deficit. In addition, this dissertation provided girls the opportunity to describe what matters most to them, how they envision accomplishing their aspirations via education, and what it means to their communities.

**Feminist Ethnographic Perspective**

This section is devoted to the manner in which feminist ethnography influenced the perspectives of this study for the purposes of seeking deeper immersion in others’ worlds. The following authors brought the voices of women and girls to the forefront of research, where they described, challenged, and enriched the discussion at academic conferences and in juried articles. The contribution of authors of feminist ethnography is important to this research study because it elevated the lived experiences of girls in developing regions to prominence. Girls’ voices, lives, experiences, dreams, and aspirations were analyzed through a standpoint that revealed them as valued, unique, female, and shows special connections and contributions to their broader community.

Feminist ethnography is often conducted for the express purposes of giving authentic voice to participants in research. These feminists acknowledge the co-creation
of knowledge while attending to power dynamics within, during, and after research activities. Foley, Levinson, and Hurtig (2001) introduced the characteristics of feminist ethnography:

We view the field of feminist education ethnography in terms of those scholars who tend to work with or for girls and young women specifically, as well as those who analyze gender dynamics and relations between and among male and female students. . . . What these scholars generally share is a focus on how different social processes occurring in the school can and often do operate to reproduce girls’ and women’s structural subordination to men and to prevent girls and women from identifying their common plight with another across class, ethnic and sexual differences. (p. 59)

Through observations and interviews feminist ethnographers seek to discover any and all everyday experiences in schools, families, and communities that contribute to the subordination, struggle, or exclusion of girls and women. In addition and particularly relevant to the current study, these same scholars may also uncover any and all agency and successes girls and women experience in spite of the same barriers. They have contributed: the differences between girls’ and women’s school experiences from boys and men, the notion that gender is a unique category of the lives of students, and also that patriarchy is a systemic enterprise that is connected to and influenced by capitalism and racism (Foley et al., 2001).

Addressing the experiences of girls in schools, Stambach’s (2000) study of the agricultural connection between “what women and men do” and their relationship with
the land, is a classic example of feminist ethnography. Many of the frameworks described above are in Stambach’s study as well as the current study on Southeastern Turkish girls. She described the women’s work in terms of harvesting fruit and patching roofs of homes while the boys and men built and maintained the life-giving irrigation systems and bridges. Similarly, aforementioned review literature demonstrates that Turkish girls and boys experience different access and outcomes in school. These differences are critical to feminist research. In Stambach’s Tanzanian villages, women performed different tasks at home, but they also studied different subjects in school. The state-mandated home economics curriculum focused on the female body and also included cookery and nutrition, mother craft, and dressmaking. Stambach made the case that Tanzanian girls were groomed to manage the household for political stability, “establishing control over the terms of marriage and reproduction is one way that that state might be able to control the future” (p. 60). The findings in the current study also address the social, cultural, and gendered dimensions of Turkish girls in school. Both studies, Stambach’s ethnography in Tanzania and the current case study in Turkey, examine the role of gender in the girls’ broader community contexts.

Stambach (2000) used the voices of Tanzanian girls to describe the schooling and lifestyle choices they face. One village girl viewed husbands as a liability and a danger. Emi said that if she avoided marriage, she’d have more control over the money she earned on her own. She’d be able to save money for her children’s school fees without ever worrying that her husband would commandeer her savings.
The process of becoming independent of the village as young women proved very difficult in both studies as well. The few young women who successfully moved into urban life became legends in the minds of younger Tanzanian girls who dreamed of “new possibilities.” The findings in the current research study also contained stories of how Turkish girls navigated between and among generations.

Stambach (2000) delivered the three hallmarks of a feminist (ethnography) author detailed above by (a) writing an entire book about girls in school on Mt. Kilimanjaro; (b) perusing the notion that “gender matters” by interviewing girls, women, and men from the village on that specific subject receiving revealing answers related to gender; and finally (c) linking the reproduction of gender roles to the economic stability of the state (p. 98). The interesting outcome of all of these stories is that the girls in both studies continued to aspire toward more education despite the tremendous gendered odds against success. The girls managed to choose schooling over gendered, patriarchal barriers and challenges.

In another example of feminist writing about girls in school, Adely (2004) delivered a compelling picture of the lived experiences of girls in secondary school in Jordan. A common metaphor that many Jordanians (male and female) used to describe the power of education is that of the weapon. She learned that “education as a weapon” is a commonly repeated cliché that implies a source of strength or a resource needed to secure one’s future—an oft-used cliché utilized for everyone and not just girls. However, the students [girls in her study] emphasized that this was “a weapon in the hands of girls.” So they might have
been using an oft-repeated and gender-neutral cliché but it seemed to take on a
gendered dimension in their conversations. The school girls would say, “It is a
weapon for women in this society” and “Education is a weapon, especially for
women.” (pp. 365–366)

By using the voices of school girls, Adely (2004) illustrated the lived experiences
of the participants in her research, demonstrating the gendered nature of the experiences
of her participants. She linked these experiences to the lived experiences the girls face
outside school, at home, and in the broader society. Her research enriched and informed
academics and practitioners about the new “spaces” opened up to girls through schooling.
The number of feminist ethnographies in the Middle East and adjoining regions is
limited, and Adely provided an excellent entrée by initiating a discussion of the broader
impact of increased access for girls in Middle Eastern schools.

**Girls to School Research**

Girls to school research is a relatively new line of inquiry in education. Using the
human development and capabilities scholarship as a springboard, several researchers
have identified measurable empowerment outcomes among girls who pursued schooling
in developing regions. In addition, international organizations and UN organizations
have produced documents about this international development work.

In 1999 Heward and Bunwaree edited a collection of articles entitled *Gender, 
Education and Development*. The authors of the collected articles examined the gender
gap in education in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Unterhalter, a key author, wrote about
the schooling of girls in South Africa, addressing girls’ relationships with teachers,
mothers, and empowerment in her study. She later became a noted scholar in girls’ education research. Aikman, Unterhalter, and Challender (2005) and Aikman and Unterhalter (2006) wrote on a broad range of topics in the girls-to-school movement, also known as girls’ education; they covered policy, practice, curriculum, economics, politics, globalization, diversity, and HIV/AIDS.

The lines of inquiry most closely related to this dissertation include the human development and capability research presented in Unterhalter’s work and the capabilities framework developed by Seeberg in her work in rural China (2011). Unterhalter (2007) stated, “Capabilities or the potential to achieve valued outcomes are distinguished from functionings, that is, what is actually achieved” (p. 76). Both Unterhalter and Seeberg explored the gendered worlds of girls in regions of the world where girls were denied access to schooling. This study, in developing southeastern Turkey, aligns with those lines of inquiry because the participants are interviewed as experts in their desire for further education, and their statements and comments are mined for understanding of the aspirations they had reason to value.

Popular media have also entered this growing field of girls to school, reflecting the interest shown by the public and mostly Western media in these girls and women. Much of the interest was generated by the news media focus on Afghan girls excluded from basic human rights and education after Operation Enduring Freedom commenced shortly after September 11, 2001. Then First Lady Laura Bush initiated a high-profile campaign to build a case against the cruelty meted out on Afghan women by the Taliban
(“Laura Bush Addresses,” 2001). At the time of this writing, the Afghan Women’s Project was still an important project for the Bushes (George W. Bush Institute, 2013).

_Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide_ by Kristof and WuDunn (2009) and their film (2012) of the same title has been screened across the US. This book and film, which brought the attention of an even larger audience to the perils and plight of women and girls around the world, included discussions about girls to school as well as related issues in health and development for women.

The most recent chapter in recognizing the plight of girls to school efforts in developing regions is the awarding of the 2014 Noble Peace Prize to co-awardee, Malala Yousafzai. Her much publicized experience of being shot in the head in October 2012 in her father’s school bus, on her way to school in the Swat Valley in Pakistan, garnered the attention of a shocked and sympathetic global audience (Yousafzai, 2013).

The United Nations introduced a new organizational section in 2008, United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI). Unterhalter (2010) prepared the UNGEI statement on the status of girls’ education for the UNGEI E4 conference held in Dakar, Senegal, in May 2010. Her executive summary summoned the help of all stakeholders to work together to address the continued challenges of sending girls to school to see gender equality and equity across the globe and education for all.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The current study in southeastern Turkey benefits from a diverse review of the literature in four important dimensions. First, the literature provides a strong and
descriptive background about the political and gendered context in which the research was conducted. Not only is the research field influenced heavily by gender, but also the inextricable connections between Islam, culture, and politics in Turkey. Although Turkey presents as a unique case in the Middle Eastern and European crossroads, the experiences of girls in southeastern and developing Turkey resemble those of girls in neighboring and MENA countries.

The Human Development Capability Approach and the burgeoning field of girls to school research promote a modern perspective on the receding influence of economics in qualitative case studies on girls’ education and the growing production of knowledge around the individual and collective desires and values of people in research studies. Both of these approaches to research coupled with feminist research goals create a promising opportunity to not only hear the voices of girls in southeastern Turkey, but to also understand and understand the voices through empirical research methods.
CHAPTER III
DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

Research Approach

In this research I took a feminist qualitative case study approach in an effort to capture multiple, individual meanings in the experiences of girls imagining their future in southeastern Turkey. Merriam (2002) described meaning as “socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon that it is assumed to be in positivist research” (p. 5). In fact, the goal was not to find a fixed truth or reality but to hear the emic, or insider, meanings and gain understandings from the participants themselves.

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis. Since understanding is the goal of the research, the human instrument, which is able to be immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data. Other advantages are that the researcher can expand his or her understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information (data) immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses. (Merriam, 2002, p. 5)

Merriam (2002) demonstrated the flexible and fluid nature of qualitative research that provides a researcher an opportunity to adjust understandings and meanings throughout the research process. By considering factors such as nonverbal and contextual information, the researcher can gather rich and highly descriptive data. All of
these qualitative characteristics blend well in a research study about the experiences of girls because I came from an experience and a perspective very different from the participants; therefore, I benefited from the flexibility and fluid nature of the qualitative process. Instead of a quick snapshot capturing the enrollment of girls in education or training, this study contains rich description of the meaning of schooling opportunities as imagined by individuals in developing Turkey. The research provided an opportunity to discover, uncover, or illuminate new data related to girls’ education in Turkey while allowing for the unexpected or unfamiliar. This qualitative research approach was also enhanced by “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973), which helps to transport the reader into the world of the participant. In this study the words of the participants were essential in describing those experiences that were very different from mine, much less the reader’s.

My feminist approach was influenced by the authors discussed in Chapter 2. Similar to Stambach (2000), I deliver the three hallmarks of a feminist author by (a) writing entirely about girls’ experience in schools in southeastern Turkey; (b) exploring how “gender matters” by interviewing girls, women, and others from the community on a specific subject related to gender; and finally (c) linking the girls’ experiences to the broader community context.

With these characteristics in mind and with a holistic view, I focused on the culture of girls who may have been empowered through schooling initiatives. I listened to the voices of women leaders, teachers, and family members and studied the goals of publications presented by various girls-to-school programs in the region. More specifically, because of the feminist qualitative case study methodology, I was able to
cultivate emergent understandings from the stories of participants, describe the social context, and elucidate meanings with attention to gender.

Finally, the properties of a case study allow the research to focus around a purposefully chosen setting while also investigating the meanings of diverse people and experiences. Merriam (1998) defined a case study as a method of “investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding a phenomenon” (p. 41). Although authors such as Van Wynsberghe and Khan (2007) called into question whether a case study can be defined as a method, methodology, or a research design, I accepted Merriam’s definition for the purposes of this research study.

Southeastern Turkey

Southeastern Turkey is strongly identified with a unique federal government project established in the 1970s to bring water and energy to the arid and impoverished region. The region is often referred to as the Southeastern Anatolia Project or the GAP region; GAP is an acronym for Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi, meaning the Great Anatolian Project in Turkish. Although GAP is a government project, it also became the way Turkish people refer to the southeastern provinces of the country, where the project was administered. This multisector and integrated regional development effort was transformed into a socioeconomic venture in the 1980s in the context of sustainable development. Its basic objectives included:

- The improvement of living standards and income levels of people so as to eliminate regional development disparities and contributing to such national goals as social stability and economic growth by enhancing productivity and
employment opportunities in the rural sector. The project area covers 9 administrative provinces (Adiyaman, Batman, Diyarbakir, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Sanliurfa and Sirnak) in the basins of the Euphrates and Tigris and in Upper Mesopotamia. (GAP, 2013)

The GAP program encompassed a variety of industries to improve the lives of the people living in this developing region of Turkey. These industries included, Irrigation, hydraulic energy, agriculture, rural and urban infrastructure, forestry, education and health. The water resources development component of the program envisages the construction of 22 dams and 19 hydraulic power plants and irrigation of 1.82 million hectares of land. The total cost of the project is estimated as 32 billion US $. The total installed capacity of power plants is 7476 MW and projected annual energy production reaches 27 billion kWh. (GAP, 2013)

The project aims to benefit current and future generations and to provide an environment that can sustain growth and development over the decades. (See maps in Appendix B.)

The pressure of becoming a member of the European Union furthermore encouraged Turkish leaders to seek development projects for GAP communities and families. Education for the many girls missing from school in rural and urban GAP areas became a primary focus for government, corporate, and NGO entities alike. I observed substantial infrastructure projects undertaken between 2004 and 2010 in Sulemaniya, the research location, including a new regional airport, a modern bus transportation center, newly paved roads, modern urban apartment structures, and numerous additions to aqueducts
and electricity. Potable water and proper sanitation still remained a challenge during the research study period.

The region was home to a considerable population of Kurdish people. A large portion of the region’s people speak Kurdish in their everyday lives; however, Turkish is the official language of schools. The tensions of language, poverty, and politics were still very palpable in the GAP region as a result of the 30-year conflict with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, known as PKK, an acronym for Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan in Kurdish. The group has been labeled a terrorist organization by both Turkey and the US. At the time of this writing, the PKK was in the process of negotiating with the Turkish government to obtain improved civil rights and other humanitarian and fulfill economic demands (GAP, 2013).

I worked on a grant project from 2004–2006 implemented in the southeastern provinces of Turkey. This research study commenced in 2009. The cultural context observed from 2004 to 2010 (Table 1) provided me with a broad swath of relevant experiences and opportunities to see how women and girls lived their lives in the GAP region, where people were resilient, friendly, generous, and optimistic. They appeared cognizant of the challenges they faced in their communities and proud of the history and culture deeply embedded in the region.

**Research Procedure and Time Table**

The research procedure essentially included two Phases and additional complimentary data collections during an intensive six-year period (approximately 2004–2010). The observations, learning, and knowledge accumulated through the initial
grant funded by the US Department of State, the formal field research in Phase I and Phase II, and the subsequent writing, analyzing, and communication afterward, resulted in a rounded, 360-degree view of my research site and participants. Additionally, I benefited from relationships developed during the grant period and during the research phases that informed my understanding of the research context, which extended the field work from six total weeks of interviews and observation during June 2009 and July 2010 to more than six years. Turkish participants included the core group of interviewees, long-term partners, and additional research participants’ personal communications. Table 1 represents an overview of the research procedure over time.

**Phase 1: 2009**

In July 2009, I interviewed four girls-to-school administrators and NGO leaders based on a convenience sample of individuals involved with a civil monitoring project for girls’ education in Sulemaniya. The Ministry of Education initiated a broad-based program to monitor the various progress and challenges encountered by local leaders while trying to increase the number of girls accessing education in the GAP region. This group served as an important source of perspective and information about the region’s attempt to improve the participation of girls in school. In addition, this phase of research included an opportunity to observe the work of a prominent family in the village of Soran, where a new school was to be built. One of the challenges facing developing Turkey was a lack of proper school buildings in rural areas and a general lack of classroom seats in schools across the region (rural and urban). This new school building in Soran was to serve students in a dozen small nearby villages; therefore, visiting the
**Table 1**

*Time Table of Research Related Data Collection 2004–2010+

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>People Involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004–2006</td>
<td>State Department Grant: Women’s Leadership and Democracy Building</td>
<td>Approx. 50 Turkish participants and 25 American participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Catom’s and NGO’s and Municipalities in GAP Region (numerous conversations related to gender and leadership in Turkey, language exchange, cultural discussions and rapport building) The research interpreter participated in country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–2009</td>
<td>National and International Conference Presentations</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–2009</td>
<td>Relationship Building, Grant Participant follow up visits to US</td>
<td>Turkish Women leaders and Grant administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January–June 2009</td>
<td>Preparation for Phase I, email communication, travel arrangements</td>
<td>Hosts in Turkey, Interpreters, Grant Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>Travel to Turkey for Phase I, interviews, observations in Soran, Sulemaniya, GAP Region (1+ week)</td>
<td>Interpreter, Host families, Grant Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2009–March 2010</td>
<td>Scholarly writing, presentations, research questions</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010–June 2010</td>
<td>Travel and research preparations, emails, arrangements and accommodations for family</td>
<td>Grant participants, colleagues, research interpreters, host families, school administrators, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>CIES conference presentation in Istanbul</td>
<td>Colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2010–July 2010</td>
<td>5 weeks in country for research</td>
<td>Author and three children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews, observations Istanbul, Soran &amp; Sulemaniya</td>
<td>Research participants, interpreters, grant participants, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Communication 2004–2016</td>
<td>Emails, social media</td>
<td>Grant participants, colleagues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
school directly before its opening provided a unique opportunity to gauge the on-the-ground impact of girls-to-school initiatives in one rural area. The school was built based on a broad coalition of private and public actors, spanning from donors in Istanbul to local efforts for busing. This research trip, in combination with several previous experiences with educators, community leaders, women leaders, and government officials in the GAP region, painted a broader picture of the context for the study of girls’ education. During the interviews, Arzu, an employee of a government program served as an interpreter. Her credentials included language skills in Turkish, Kurdish, and some Arabic. Arzu participated in the civil monitoring effort and provided assistance in locating additional civil monitoring group members. Her knowledge of the region and its schooling challenges provided additional depth to the interview process.

Phase 1 provided the opportunity to analyze the research location and the cultural context thoroughly. I examined how the community initiated and monitored programs aimed at bringing girls to school. Leaders were interviewed to acquire a perspective on the goals and challenges of federal and local programs for girls; furthermore, civil monitoring members revealed the gains girls achieved, the prospects for improved local communities when more girls access education, and the impact girls can make in their family life and community contributions. Observations of schools and other cultural contexts made in July 2009 during Phase 1 are recorded in Tables 4 and 5 later in the chapter. Participants in four formal recorded interviews that occurred during Phase 1 are described in Table 2.
Table 2

*Officials and Community Participants in Sulemaniya, July 24, 2009*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Role in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahmet (M)</td>
<td>Dean, teacher</td>
<td>Member of Sulemaniya civil monitoring group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuba (F)</td>
<td>Local government employee, had trouble accessing school as a young girl</td>
<td>Member of both local and national civil monitoring group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sevim (F)</td>
<td>Local government employee, photographer, women’s rights advocate</td>
<td>Member of Sulemaniya civil monitoring group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arzu (F)</td>
<td>Regional government employee, women’s center advocate, administrator of scholarships for girls</td>
<td>Member of Sulemaniya civil monitoring group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(All interviewed and audio recorded, M = Male and F = Female)

**Phase 2: 2010**

The purpose of Phase 2 was to continue the previous year’s research and study the experiences and perspectives of girls impacted by girls-to-school initiatives in Sulemaniya, Turkey. During this second phase of research in 2010, my three school-aged children accompanied me during the interviews taking place this time. Their presence helped identify me as a woman and mother of children of both genders as well as a mother of girls at the onset of puberty and adolescence.

While we stayed within the community, I practiced caution to avoid a level of participation that violated the sacred spaces where observation, recording, and reflecting on the academic and emancipatory purposes of the research questions were to take place.
Arzu was again available to provide interpreting, which enhanced the continuity of the study. Providing access to a convenience sample of girls who received scholarships to continue their education, she contacted the families and arranged interviews with 5 girls and their families. I also interviewed 2 young women from the prominent family in Soran. These interviews revealed the schooling experiences of girls in southeastern Turkey, their aspirations for their futures, and their thoughts about improving girls’ education in Turkey. The data from both phases were examined and analyzed as a body of data for the purposes of answering my research questions.

**Participants**

I interviewed or observed two distinct sets of participants: (a) officials and community members from my 2009 study and (b) 7 girls or young women who benefited from girls-to-school scholarships. I also encountered the mothers of several of these girls during the interview process. The location of this research was available for investigation based on relationships and contacts developed during my 2009 study and previous professional contacts in southeastern Turkey. The participants were all directly tied to the girls-to-school movement in Turkey either as members of civil monitoring groups described below or beneficiaries of girls-to-school scholarships. I selected this convenience sample because of the individuals’ proximity to the research topic and their direct and personal experiences in the GAP region with girls-to-school issues. All names and locations (except Istanbul, a mega-city of over 15 million people) have been changed to protect identities. (Participant data appear in Tables 2 and 3.)
Officials and Community Participants

The Millennium Development Goals and Gender Equality in Education: 2005 Evaluation Report of National and Civil Monitoring Groups (Mother Child Education Foundation et al., 2005) published the findings of a national project to increase girls’ participation in schools known as the Project to Achieve Gender Equity in Education and Social Participation. Three partners sponsored this federal-level initiative under the supervision of the Turkish Ministry of Education: the Mother-Child Education Foundation (ACEV), the Association for the Support and Education of Women Candidates (KA-DER), and the Educational Reform Initiative (ERG). This initiative developed civil monitoring groups in three southeastern Turkish cities (including one in Sulemaniya) and a fourth group in Istanbul. A national group of representatives from those four local groups was convened in Ankara to work with the Ministry of Education. The four participants interviewed as noted in Table 2 were selected to participate in the civil monitoring groups as a result of their leadership in the local community, their roles in education and advocacy, and their willingness to participate in this initiative.

Because the primary research question was focused on the experiences and perceptions of girls, what I gleaned from institutional voices and publications was compared with what the girls believed they gained from schooling, contributing to the cultural and political context of girls in school. These interviews in 2009 were conducted at the offices and professional settings of the officials and community members.
Table 3

*Girls and Their Mothers in Sulemaniya, June and July 2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Grade/Level</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dilek</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sulemaniya</td>
<td>girls’ technical and vocational high school</td>
<td>6-26-10</td>
<td>high school history teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sulemaniya</td>
<td>high school ninth grade</td>
<td>6-26-10</td>
<td>genetic engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuran</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sulemaniya</td>
<td>junior high school, eighth grade</td>
<td>6-26-10</td>
<td>broadcast journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulay</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sulemaniya</td>
<td>completed fourth grade</td>
<td>6-26-10</td>
<td>mother of daughter, 12; and son, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elif</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sulemaniya</td>
<td>high school graduate, taking college entrance exam</td>
<td>6-26-10</td>
<td>kindergarten teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyla</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Istanbul (from Sulemaniya and Soran)</td>
<td>college student</td>
<td>7-10-10</td>
<td>architecture interior design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songul</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Istanbul (from Sulemaniya and Soran)</td>
<td>high school equivalency program</td>
<td>7-10-10</td>
<td>writer and political scientist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two of the young women interviewed had been awarded no scholarship but received financial assistance from male relatives (Leyla and Songul). Table 3 provides an overview of the participants, including age, location, and future career goals.
Girls and Their Mothers

Female participants were the primary focus for study in this research. I benefited by having a sample of participant girls acquired through a professional colleague, who had developed longstanding trust with girls who had received scholarships and their families. I, therefore, gained some trust from the participants by proxy. Consequently, I conducted the interviews in the homes of the girl participants, where they felt most comfortable. The participants included school-aged participants who were in middle school and above. The mothers with daughters-in-school varied in range in adulthood age. Five of the young women and girls participated in a special regional scholarship for girls to continue school. It was remarkable to listen to the girls and their mothers express themselves in a culture that promotes silence. Women and girls are not generally asked for opinions or to express themselves to strangers.

Data Collection

My data collection took place at schools, in homes, at women’s community centers, and in corporate or government offices. This research was influenced by feminist ethnography as explained in Chapter 2, but is not itself an ethnographic study. A qualitative case study research approach was used to collect date, conduct interviews, and describe information gathered. I observed everyday lives of girls, being “responsive to what others are concerned about, in their own terms” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 12).

Ethnography seeks a deeper immersion in others’ worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important. With immersion, the field researcher sees
from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities, what they find meaningful, and how they do so. In this way immersion gives the fieldworker access to the fluidity of others’ lives and enhances his sensitivity to interaction and process (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 2).

Because of the limited amount of time and number of resources available to the researcher, true immersion was impossible; but because of the perspectives of my participants and my 360-degree view of their environment, a descriptive and important qualitative case study revealed the manner in which girls found meaning in their experiences in school.

**Triangulated Sources**

The 360-degree view of girls’ education in Turkey benefited from a triangulation of sources. Three groups of participants in the overall research procedure provided a balance in the collection of data. First, the officials and civil monitors provided the voice of the larger society and of educated, working individuals in Turkish society. Second, girls and their mothers courageously voiced their experiences in school and their dreams for a better future. Lastly, my interpreters and translators provided the careful relay of participants’ words into English and further explication of the meanings for a rich understanding of the issues of all parties in this research. These three different perspectives presented by three differently located populations in relation to the research subject permitted important checks and balances needed for the data analysis.
Interviewing

The interviews in both phases were recorded on a digital, mini audio recorder. The data were uploaded and stored on a secure university server. I shared copies of the data in the 2010 study with a professional from a translation service and then deleted them. Participants gave consent to audio record (Appendix B). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research in both phases of the study (Appendix C). The relationships and communication built over the course of the previous five years with Turkish women informed, prepared, and enhanced my ability to interview my research participants. The background information from those relationships were essential and not incidental to this work. The background relationships made possible interviews with participants in the villages.

The copious notes I had taken during the interviews in 2009 while interviewing adult, working professionals were of considerable help in the translation of the audio-recordings. A professional translator was later employed to translate those recordings into English. During the interviews with the younger participants in 2010, I wrote field notes in the research journal in the evenings, describing the participants, environment, locations, and experiences encountered during the day.

The individuals participated in semi-structured interviews (Appendix D). Open-ended, simple questions that Arzu could easily interpret into Turkish and, therefore, ask the participants, provided the beginning of the conversations with them. In 2009, the questions opened with learning the participants’ familiarity with certain girls-to-school initiatives in Turkey. In 2010, I explained who I was and what I wanted to learn and
introduced my three children before the interviews commenced. We first talked about the participants’ experiences in school. Then we talked about what the participants wished to pursue in the future. The ensuing conversations became broader and we talked about their thoughts related to girls-to-school initiatives.

Interviewees were asked to talk about their experiences in school and visions for the future: “Tell me what it is like to be a girl in this school?” Older girls, parents, and teachers were asked, “Why should girls go to school?” I organically developed additional questions based on observations and experiences in the local community; for example, “If you were the Prime Minister, what would you do to help girls get to school?” Similar questions were used for the community participants as I tried to gain a holistic understanding of the larger community view of the girls to school efforts.

Observations

I made field observations at three schools (urban and rural), held conversations with administrators and teachers, and witnessed several tutoring sessions at centers. Table 4 provides a description of the school visits, and Table 5 discloses various observations of cultural context analyzed in the study (Appendices E–H).

One of my host families provided a tour of a small village (Appendix E) and the adjacent village school (Appendix F) on the border of Syria. The school showed signs of wear and tear, but otherwise was in reasonable condition on the outside. It looked modest in design. Additionally, it was close to the village community and would be a short walk for children. I immediately noticed that students would need to go outside to use the latrine. The bathroom was a separate building, across from the school and play
area. I needed to see a village school and a village to understand the circumstances and setting for my research on girls who may have trouble getting to school in GAP. Not every village had a school in GAP. The village did not have a high school.

**Table 4**

*School Visits*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date Visited</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village elementary school (old)</td>
<td>Soran, Turkey</td>
<td>7-25-09</td>
<td>Yellow, one-story, outside bathrooms, small playground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village elementary school (new)</td>
<td>Soran, Turkey</td>
<td>7-25-09</td>
<td>Red, two-story, new construction; parking lot; with principal toured building, classrooms, principal's office, and old preschool on the grounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban middle school (Grades 6–8)</td>
<td>Sulemaniya, Turkey</td>
<td>6-25-10</td>
<td>Two-story building, two children per seat, large gated parking lot; teacher's end-of-school meetings; guided tour by history teacher; met teachers, spoke with principal off the record; school is only half-day because of insufficient seating for the urban population.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The family then drove across dirt roads and passed fields of fresh cucumbers and peppers to show me the brand new school. This school (Appendix G) was not adjacent to any villages, but close to several villages by bus. This school was being completed in 2010 and was the example school of private and public cooperation in the region. I met the school principal and he showed me the original old, one room school that was being repurposed for pre-kindergarten. He showed me the trailer where teachers normally live during the school year. Teachers are trained in large city universities and then are
Table 5  
*Observations of Cultural Context*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational high school</td>
<td>Gaziantep, Turkey</td>
<td>July 2009</td>
<td>Observed school classrooms, interviewed principal off the record, reviewed student artwork, textiles, looms, technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s centers (CATOMS)</td>
<td>Sulemaniya, Mardin, Diyarbakir, Turkey</td>
<td>2004–2006</td>
<td>Observed women in literacy classes, children in tutoring, toddlers in childcare, sewing and technology classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village transportation</td>
<td>Soran, Turkey</td>
<td>July 2009</td>
<td>Rental car, rural dolmuses (minibus), city bus, intercity buses, bus terminals (village and urban)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village home (one room)</td>
<td>Soran, Turkey</td>
<td>July 2009</td>
<td>One room, mudbrick domicile, dirt floor, carpets, bedding stored, cable TV, one air conditioning unit, no chairs or tables; cow or horse tied outside to tree; shoes left outside; traditional meals served on low tables or floor (picnic style).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village homestead (farming community)</td>
<td>Sulemaniya, Turkey (rural outlying area)</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>Multioom home with kitchen, inside bathroom, adjacent mudbrick homes for farm hands; olive trees, fruit trees, free-range chickens, modern farm equipment; traditional meals served on low tables or floor (picnic style).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban apartments (various)</td>
<td>Sulemaniya, Turkey</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>Second floor, two- to four-room apartment, modern furniture, air conditioning, cable TV, Eastern-style toilet (sometimes adjacent to apartment outside, sometimes inside); personal computers or laptops; shoes left outside; traditional meals served on low tables or floor (picnic style).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban apartment</td>
<td>Istanbul, Turkey</td>
<td>July 2010</td>
<td>Asian side of Istanbul; transportation via city bus; tall, modern apartment building; modern furniture, multiple generations sharing four rooms; modern galley kitchen, dining room table, Western bathroom, modern appliances and amenities (e.g., parking, air conditioning, TV, computers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
assigned to schools, often far away from their home regions. Many of the schools being built in this region are designed to accommodate larger numbers of students to serve more villages, so more children are in school through grade 8. Again, this rural area does not have high school service.

The urban middle school I visited provided a comparison to the more rural village areas toured. I was provided a tour by one of the teachers. The desks and benches accommodated two students and looked cramped and uncomfortable compared to American school rooms.

Each of the above observations provided understanding for the daily lives of my participants. I needed to learn about the spaces where women and girls conducted their daily lives. I visited a vocational high school where a woman held the assistant principal position. She provided a tour of the kind of training and preparation girls would aspire to attain in school beyond the eighth grade. She also demonstrated the importance of female role models, as most of the administrators I met in this study were men.

The homes and neighborhoods, villages, and CATOMs offered examples of places that girls studied, ate and slept, learned skills, communicated with family and friends, and dreamed of a happy future. Although poverty surrounded many of the participants, each home, business, and inner room was full of hospitality and pride.

**Field Notes**

Note-taking was open and overt in nature. Emerson et al. (1995) suggested, 

The fieldworker should start open jottings early on in contacts with those studied.

... People often understand that such activities are required of students and,
therefore, tolerate and accommodate the needs of researchers who, they believe, want to faithfully represent what goes on. (p. 22)

In addition to field notes, I used another important source of data, field notes, that I derived from my drawing connections, producing questions and original thoughts, insights, and responses to the observations and interviews. I kept a research diary to log experiences as the research provided additional information and data to mine during the analytical phase of the research study.

Language and Translation

The people living in the GAP region negotiate life using three languages: Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic. The GAP region abuts Syria and Iraq, so the use of Arabic was common in the region. Local businessmen in Sulemaniya conduct business and daily life in three languages and across borders.

Turkish was the official language, national language, and the only language taught to children in school. Kurdish was the language of the largest minority population in Turkey. The GAP region maintained a very high proportion of Kurdish people. Adults, parents, and grandparents tended to speak Kurdish, but younger Kurdish people spoke Kurdish and Turkish. Arzu, the local interpreter for this study, was able to speak Turkish, Kurdish, English, and some Arabic. She worked on this project during both phases in 2009 and 2010 and had a very good understanding of the research topic; furthermore, she worked in women’s centers in her professional life and was involved with girls’ scholarships as a volunteer. A professional translator, who only understood Turkish, not Kurdish, translated the audio recordings into English (in the US). The
regional accent hindered the translator in a few isolated instances in the translation of the interviews. One of my participants, Leyla, enjoyed practicing her English during our interviews. Some of the research quotes are her English words and not professionally translated. She used Turkish whenever her English speaking ability faltered. Her Turkish was translated by the professional translator. A sample of the professional translation was also sent to both the on-the-ground interpreter in the GAP region and another native Turkish speaker, who is a professional U.S. Department of State interpreter, to cross-check the accuracy of the translation.

**Data Analysis**

After the audio recordings were transcribed into English, I began the process of open coding. I initially marked the printed transcripts line-by-line in the margins, entertaining all analytic possibilities in an attempt to discover as many ideas and themes as possible, but also staying close to what was written down in the fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 1995). I chose to use colored font in the word processing document and created special places for notes at the bottom of the document page in order to read and reread “the transcriptions to identify key words, patterns, ideas, and themes” (Seeberg, 2011). Additionally, I was able to look for Seeberg’s themes of wellbeing, agency, and achievement/aspirations.

The next phase of analysis included mining the prepared data for themes or concepts to help inform the study. I drew upon ethnographic techniques to analyze the data in this qualitative case study, using two specific techniques for this step: focused coding and analytic memos. During focused coding, the ethnographer must read and
reread the data line-by-line and build up and elaborate upon interesting themes (Emerson et al., 1995). First, I reviewed all of the open codes in the margins and then located common themes or concepts among the multiple transcripts. I returned to the data with these concepts to see if they were substantiated across the data, finding the outliers and deciding how those fit into the overall picture. Emerson et al. (1995) suggested that

> While the researcher delights in numerous examples of a theme or a topic, the goal in ethnographic analysis is not representativeness. Rather, the ethnographer seeks to identify patterns and variations in relationships and in the ways that members understand and respond to conditions and contingencies in the social setting. . . . When the ethnographer is fortunate enough to find more than one instance, it is important to note how they are the same and how they vary. (p. 162)

Emerson et al. provided a useful reminder to not only become interested in the similarities or to be enticed by the lure of representativeness, but more importantly to gain understanding and meaning behind the context and setting of the points of data collected. Being a mindful and thorough researcher is a valuable tenant of ethnography.

**Open Coding Categories**

The first task of the data analysis included reviewing the data for themes and general categories to sort the data. This process is called Open Coding, which allowed the data to be sorted into coding terms that represented a concept mentioned numerous times by participants. The eight codes in Table 6 emerged from the initial review of the data. Each code includes a description of the theme mentioned by participants, which
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be Free</td>
<td>Be Saved, Dreams, Worry (less), Dependency (less)</td>
<td>Girls, one official</td>
<td>Dilek: Yes, that, too. To be saved, to be freed. Tuba: I always believe there are girls dreaming but don’t have access to education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Others</td>
<td>(Help) Families, Themselves, Country, Young Girls, People</td>
<td>Girls, Officials, one Mother</td>
<td>Mother of Dilek: If they go to school they can help their families, get somewhere in life. Songul: Most of all help other young girls to their dreams. Tuba: When I get an opportunity, I swear, I will help others to get opportunity [to go to school].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Being Instrumental objective of education</td>
<td>Advantage, Job, Career, Know what to say, Money, More comfortable, happy life, less children, awareness</td>
<td>Girls, Mothers, Officials</td>
<td>Tulay: If they go to school, get good education, they will earn money, get a job, good life condition, not like my bad condition. Dilek: It is advantage. I will have a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Protesting, Career goals, Deciding, using rights, expressing opinions</td>
<td>Girls, Mothers, Officials</td>
<td>Hacer: We protest of course, they don’t do that but we tell them that it is necessary. We also go to school and talk with our teachers about this as well. Elif: Then, there are girls who do not get education, you know the ones, I would open schools for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement/Aspirations</td>
<td>Gaining knowledge, College, Teacher, no poverty</td>
<td>Girls, Mothers, Officials</td>
<td>Nuran: I want to be a speaker. (like Burcu Esmersoy)... She speaks very nicely. Tuba: Nobody depends on anybody. More women are active in the economy. They will use their own legal rights. There will be no poverty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (continued)

*Open Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development, Balance in Society</strong></td>
<td>Mobilize community, campaigns, schools, compulsory education until 12th grade</td>
<td>Girls and Officials</td>
<td>Nuran: Primary education (elementary and junior high) is mandatory but I would make high school mandatory too. (double check if this is from G2 or G3) Arzu: Our supporters are private companies and individuals. We mobilize community to solve one of the main problems in Turkey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scholarships, economic support</strong></td>
<td>Money for supplies, materials, living expenses</td>
<td>Girls and Officials</td>
<td>Dilek: The contribution is, it helped me to buy the supplies for school. We were freed from worrying about how to find the money for the materials. It was good. Arzu: 1500 almost, because there are 1125 currently (girls using scholarships). Leyla: But I must look [my] pocket (going out to dinner with more wealthy students in college)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role Models</strong></td>
<td>Self, knowing another way [of living], mothers</td>
<td>Officials</td>
<td>Arzu: the girls gain, first of all the girls get the opportunity to continue their education. Make some role models. This part of Turkey, people want to see concrete things. To follow. Maybe I am one of the role models also?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

participant type made such comments (Girls, Mothers, or Officials), and a sample of the words used by the participants (quote). Each of the eight open codes in Table 6 provided a window into the thoughts and feelings of the participants on the topic of girls’ education. Their stories and comments are beginning to show common themes and areas for additional analysis found in Chapter 4.
Focus Coding

The focused coding process (see Table 7) was exciting in that the first inklings of results gradually emerged. I wanted to learn if the three types of participants (girls, mothers, community members) had different messages and concepts to consider.

Table 7

*Focus Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Code</th>
<th>Sphere of Impact</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>The girls are dreaming, aspiring for a positive future</td>
<td>Songul: I wanted to have the career of my dreams. Dilek: I will have a job opportunity and I will have a better life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>The mothers are lamenting their own life paths with limited education. They are planning a future for their daughters that includes education and a better life.</td>
<td>Tulay: I don’t want them to be like me. Mother of Dilek: If they go to school they can help their families, get somewhere in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>The officials are urgent, pleading for families to send their children to school for a better future. They see a connection between human rights and education. They also see the far-reaching community consequences of an uneducated public.</td>
<td>Ahmet: We tried to convince them [the parents to send their children to school] because they will have education in the future they will be much more comfortable, they will have two children instead of 8 or 10, they will have more happy and good life. Tuba: Nobody depends on anybody. More women are active in the economy. They will use their own legal rights. There will be no poverty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I grouped the participants’ quotes into the three categories and looked for commonalities and outliers. The quotes provided in the Table 7 are samples of the kinds
of comments each group offered. Later I considered and compared these results with the findings established in other stages of my research.

As qualitative researcher I noticed patterns and connected and compared them during the formal writing process, specifically through the analytic memo. From the analytic memos, emergent themes became evident. In other words, I pulled together thematic issues or concepts across the interview transcripts and observations that might be explained or revealed to another audience.

**Researcher Roles and Ethics**

Feminist perspectives on research methodology primarily influenced my work. I continuously examined the position I took in relationship to the participants of the study. “In other words, the attention to and concern about relationships with subjects—including concerns about issues of reciprocity, representation, and voice—is uniquely feminist” (Pillow & Mayo, 2007, p. 163). I not only thought about relationships but also wrote about them in my research diary, seeking to contribute to the community in which the study was conducted based on relevant experience and expertise in education; however, the role of contributor was not the primary reason for my participation at the community centers. I remained vigilant in my efforts to avoid a level of participation that removed me from the sacred spaces where I observed, recorded, and reflected on the academic and emancipatory purposes of the research questions; furthermore, I did not intervene or unnecessarily influence the culture or content of the communities observed. Pillow and Mayo (2007) stated, “Finding a balance as an observer and a participant—when to wear the researcher hat and when to become involved by giving your opinion, providing help,
or actively leading a project—is difficult and specific to the research context” (p. 163). This approach contrasted with participation that would have been sporadic, attention-getting, and superfluous. The goal was to become a friendly outsider who was learning about a community and helping along the way. One example of a form of helping was consulting with community leaders and teachers about virtual connections between American school children and their Turkish counterparts. I hope I left behind fond or benign memories of the American woman and her three children who came to visit.

The participants were protected from risks during the research process in several important ways. It is possible that my work could be considered politically risky to some of my participants. To prevent my participants from being exposed to undue social pressure or political consequences, I did not photograph my participants. I did not dwell on Kurdish issues or ask direct questions about Kurdish politics, resources, or activism. Also, my association with an insider who knew the girl participants helped me to avoid stumbling onto unintended feelings of sadness and depression. I did not research the details of any participants’ traumas, or personal family stories that would lead to distress. In order to prevent consuming time and personal resources (refreshments, work hours, etc.), I avoided delaying my interviews, cancelling appointments, or dallying in the homes of participants. My family ate and drank only courteous amounts of food and drink while in our participants’ homes. Although hospitality and generosity are hallmarks of pride in Turkey, I was cognizant that my research work should not “cost” my participants precious resources.
Reliability and Validity

Not only did I need to recognize how presence in the community influences the research but also how to attend to a variety of validity-related dilemmas germane to this particular study. In particular, new researchers must gain awareness of the responsibility intrinsic in conducting ethical and accurate research as well as conduct research in a distant place while navigating local customs and language and more importantly representing the data appropriately and honestly. Schram (2006) explained:

Your task, [as researcher] both derived from and constrained by your presence, is thus inherently interpretive and incomplete. The bottom line is that there is no bottom line: It is not necessary (or feasible) to reach some ultimate truth for your study to be credible and useful. (p. 103)

The objective of this research was not to find “the truth” about girls in southeastern Turkey and their educational goals but instead to engage with a community, exploring connections and reporting experiences and thoughts about the situation. The process of engaging, exploring, and reporting (or representing) were influenced by my own perspectives and experiences; furthermore, I considered the role of power and privilege afforded to me through the financial, educational, and social resources that my Turkish and Kurdish participants and others may not have had. I chose Turkey as the research location because of my previous experiences there in women’s leadership building and my interest in girls’ education. Although the language and culture were different from my own, I sought to benefit from the expertise and guidance of local interpreters and professional translators as well as from the thoughtful review of literature
and data. I was cognizant of the potential issues of reliability before, during, and after data collection; so the chances for excessive leaps in logic or misinterpretations of participants’ words were also mitigated.

My analysis of the data was informed by the literature presented in Chapter 2 and also by my own experiences, observations, and education. I observed the palpable resistance of people in the more conservative, developing regions of Turkey and other MENA countries projected onto the dreams and desires of girls who wished to attend school, and I heard the voices of girls who fought lowered expectations and collected their ideas. In addition, the study shows evidence of capabilities described by their stories of agency, well-being, or achievement. Finally, I illustrated the lived experiences of girls in southeastern Turkey, girls in control of their destiny. I viewed the lives, experiences, dreams, and aspirations of girls through a framework that revealed them as valued, unique, and female, forming special connections and making contributions to their broader community.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), “The worth of a study is the degree to which it generates theory, description or understanding” (p. 33). Understanding the lived experiences of girls in southeastern Turkey is relevant to the 21st century educational and political landscape. By understanding how girls in GAP view their experiences, aspirations, and capabilities, more actors in education and politics can perhaps gain insight into addressing the immediate needs of girls out of school and long-term solutions possible for women in developing regions.

My findings are presented in several sections. First, my findings from my observations in the previous chapter (Table 5) are explored to assist the reader in understanding the context and location of the research field. Second, I present the findings within the analytical framework suggested in Seeberg’s research (Seeberg, 2011, 2014) and specifically organized by my three research questions. After that, I present some interesting emergent themes found in my research. Finally, the focused coding categories and their descriptions present additional dimensions and themes to the previous ones.

What I Learned From My 360-Degree Observations

In order to understand the context of the participants’ experience, my observations of the participants’ environment proved key for the research and the reader. Turkey was a multi-faceted country and the research was conducted in the two-thirds of the country that is considered a “developing segment,” GAP, less European and modern than the
larger cities of Istanbul and Ankara. GAP was also more conservative, rural, and Kurdish than the northwestern and central regions of Turkey. GAP was often a place where my participants and their families began their educational journeys.

During my observations I learned, it is possible that a student could attend school in all of the above stated school (Table 4) buildings over a lifetime. Several of my participants moved from villages to cities. These transitions often accompanied family migration from rural villages to provincial cities and sometimes opportunities at city colleges as the men in the family sought employment in large cities. I visited urban concrete buildings with elaborate vocational resources, such as looms for weaving fabric. In contrast I also saw rural, woefully under resourced, school buildings with outside plumbing, and battered school facilities in the Sulemaniya Province. I gained insight into the participants’ transitions from small village schoolhouses to larger more complex two-story schools to sprawling university campuses. For the students in the family, moving typically involved moving from school building in one region to a very differently organized and constructed school building in another region.

The lack of infrastructure in the southeastern region contributed to overcrowding in school buildings, where two or three students shared a small bench and desk during their half-day schooling. The new school built on the border of Syria served a dozen or more villages and included bus transportation to and from their small villages. Although attending a new school may have been exciting, the distance from the village discouraged families who sometimes dreaded sending their daughters to school too far from home.
Sometimes sending daughters to school in the region was perceived as risky and
dangerous because of the possibility of encountering strange boys and men.

The plumbing facilities were Eastern style ground-level latrine in a small
closet-like room outside the home or apartment living area. Family furnishings included
simple, colorful cushions often lining the walls of village homes while simple and
modern sofas were used in urban apartments. Families in both villages and urban areas
enjoyed traditional meals on the floor or on low tables with or without cushions; food
was served family style. Children were included in nearly every activity and were often
out late at night unlike American children. As in the Middle East, men gathered for
music, dancing, and food at local coffee houses, hotels, or homes until late at night. If
women were at the same location, they were in a different room often with small
children. Many women were covered with a veil or hijab, but as many women were not.
Sulemaniya Province was particularly conservative compared to the other GAP
provinces, and fewer women were on the streets shopping or walking. Leyla, a
participant, noted that she did not feel comfortable in that province as a young woman:
“In [Sulemaniya] when I walk in the street, some boys harass.” This large urban district
attracted a variety of regional and international pilgrims because of the religious
attractions in the city. This holy place may have also influenced the more conservative
and religious atmosphere in the province. Tolerance for diversity in the region was high
as Christians, Jews, and Arabs mixed and mingled in vibrant cross-border business and
agricultural communities.
The impact of girls’ education could be heard at numerous levels and continued analysis should bring those levels into further focus. The following section describes themes discovered in the findings.

**Findings by Research Question and Themes**

The purpose of the study was to learn how girls understand and make meaning out of their education in southeastern Turkey. Each of the three research questions provided another opportunity to delve deeper into the data. The participants’ declarations were analyzed based on the research questions as they related to gains, empowerment, and community contexts.

**Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asks, “What do girls in Southeastern Turkey think they will gain from school?” The girls demonstrate awareness of their station in life, their family’s poverty, and the challenges they must meet in the future. Even so, they also reveal a bright optimism for their future by delineating specific career goals and optimistic outlooks. Reviewing the three open codes together provides clues to what the girls believe they will gain from continued schooling and the themes discussed in Chapter 5. (See Table 8.)

**To be free.** The theme of being free, being set free from some constraint, or freedom, came across as a powerful yet infrequent concept from the participants. These sentiments should not be relegated to the bottom of the data pile, but examined carefully and compared with the words Sen (1999) shared: “Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or less formally
Table 8

Research Question 1 Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Participant Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be Free</td>
<td>Dilek: I think they should go to school even more than the boys because even when they marry . . . (Arzu continues “She says, because when you get married you don’t have to depend on somebody.”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leyla: Because I want live free…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dilek: Yes, that, too. To be saved, to be freed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Help Others</td>
<td>Songul: Most of all help young girls to their dreams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Leyla’s translation is “And she wants to be a leader of the wanting . . . She wants to be a student for girls? She wants to be a leader for girls.”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Being</td>
<td>Dilek: It is advantage. I will have a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dilek: “I will have a better job opportunity and I will have a better life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Arzu’s translation, interpretation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles” (p. 75). The participant quotes in this category resonate with Sen’s definition of freedom.

Dilek wanted to be saved from a destiny like her mother’s where mom exclaims, “I am ignorant, I don’t even know [how] to talk on the phone.” Dilek also felt a sense of relief and freedom when she received a scholarship to continue her studies. She was freed from the worry, frustration, and isolation of not being able to pursue her desires, “It was difficult. To stay home, not do anything. I was away from my friends. I got behind in my studies. I got behind my friends.”

Leyla dreams of a freedom reserved for women who live in the less conservative, large urban cities of northern Turkey. There she can walk freely down the street without harassment or having to explain her freedom, “In Sulemaniya, I cannot walk in the street.”
Tuba, one of the women officials I spoke with, grew up in Sulemaniya and through education became a successful, empowered business woman. She knows that there are many young girls who dream of the relatively boundless freedom she now enjoys in Sulemaniya and strives to help girls gain that same freedom, that same alternative (higher) functioning.

**Well-being.** This category had some overlap with aspirations and agency. Well-being for these participants did not involve notions of liking and/or enjoying studying or schooling as found by Seeberg (2011; Seeberg & Luo, 2012) among Chinese rural girls, but focused rather on the instrumental value, the overall better life an education can bring. Girls, mothers, and officials stated plainly that schooling leads to a better future. Even one mother (mother of Dilek) insisted that her life would have been better had she attended school longer. Although she was confident of her position, she briefly engaged in an argument with the man of the household (brother? father?) who questioned her assumption. Tulay also lamented her own lack of education while we discussed her daughter’s and son’s aspirations. She wanted to make sure that their education prevented them from experiencing the hardships she endured, “I don’t want them to be like me.” She wanted their children to live a life that was better than hers, one with a secure foundation of well-being. Participants mentioned many aspects of life that related to improved daily living. Career, job opportunity, literacy, knowledge, poise (what to say ... in a group), money, comfort, happiness are all words used by participants to describe the well-being they wanted from a life with more education.
Girls, mothers, and community participants described the anticipated gains from more education.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asks, “How has school empowered the girls?” Based on the work of scholars (Aikman et al., 2005; Kabeer, 1999; Seeberg, 2011), participants demonstrated a change in ability to choose, make decisions, and act of their own free will, therefore defining empowerment. When I compare my participant themes with the framework described by Seeberg (2011), a match was revealed. Seeberg and Luo (2011, 2012) found themes of agency and aspirations salient for girls’ education in developing China. In the present data, the girls also revealed empowerment in terms of agency and aspirations. (See Table 9.)

**Agency.** Agency is an important component/outcome of empowerment. And empowerment is a change or choice previously not available to the participant. What was it that girls/women did not have before they became educated? GAP community officials recognized the barriers working against girls going to school. One official, Ahmet, described these barriers. He said,

We saw the reasons why the women do not have education and why people do not send children to school . . . economic problems, social views, ethnicity. They didn’t know why they had to send their children to school.

After education became a part of the families’ lives, especially for the girls and mothers, both groups understood quickly what was at stake for the future of the young women. Tulay said, “If they go to school, get good education, they will earn money, get
Table 9

Research Question 2 Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Protesting</th>
<th>Hacer: We protest of course, they don’t do that but we tell them that it is necessary. We also go to school and talk with our teachers about this as well.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspiration</td>
<td>Career goals</td>
<td>Nuran: I want to be a speaker. (like Burcu Esmersoy) . . . She speaks very nicely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Deciding</td>
<td>Hacer: Last year in class, we learned some things about it in class, I researched it on the internet. Until last year I did not have a career, I was not thinking about being a doctor or a teacher. I wanted a career where I could do some research. When I found out about it I decided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Using rights</td>
<td>Nuran: No. NO! I am so young. (Q: Maybe Nuran wants to get married?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Expressing opinions</td>
<td>Songul: All limitations should be lifted and as a result of education they become different human beings . . . Among all those different opinions, and with your own education and dreams you can glean something for yourself, analyze other people’s opinions and have your own opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Gaining knowledge</td>
<td>Hacer: I learned better what to say or not say in a group. Also, how difficult life is, what affects the way you want to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspiration</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Songul: But first of all, my dream is to pass the university entry exams and get into Political Science, International Relations major.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspiration</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Elif: I would like to see myself as teacher in a school. A teacher in a kindergarten, only be with the children (laughter), to have classes with them, to talk to them, to play with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspiration</td>
<td>No poverty</td>
<td>Dilek: I will have a job opportunity and I will have a better life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mothers understood the high stakes of the game because they wanted a better life for their children than the lives they grew up in. Dilek’s mother believed, “If there was school, if I had a job, it would’ve been better.”
The girls understood that their dreams were hanging in the balance based on how much schooling they could accumulate. They also learned what agency, decisions, and choices would be available to them as a result of pursuing an education beyond the compulsory eighth grade. Dilek realizes that she would have an “advantage. I will have a job.” Hacer reminisced, “Last year in class . . . I researched it on the Internet. I wanted a career where I could do some research. When I found out about it, I decided.”

Education was bringing new opportunities and surprising horizons to the girls.

Both groups (mothers and daughters) again understood the connection. They knew their future choices depended on going to school. Additionally, both the mothers and children experienced new choices they had not had before. Tulay stated, “I would like her to become a teacher.” The mothers could dream about the possible aspirations and careers their children could achieve. The daughters could dream about possible careers based on their own research, experiences, thoughts, and beliefs (things they valued). “I wanted to have the career of my dreams,” said Tulay.

**Achievement/Aspirations they value.** Just staying in school beyond eighth grade, past the compulsory school limit was a feat. Nuran suggested, “Primary education is mandatory, but I would make high school mandatory too.” Nuran understood that the limits of an eighth grade education were very real and created barriers for girls and women in Turkey.

The girls and young women intended to not only pass their high school tests, enroll into college, but also continue to enjoy successful jobs and careers. As far as their aspirations, they were many and quite specific. Several participants wanted to be
teachers, others wanted to be activists, engineers, and so forth. Songul says, “My dreams . . . to write,” while Hacer plans “to be a genetic engineer.” Nuran wanted to follow her role model on TV; “I want to be a speaker (like Burcu Esmeroy) . . . she speaks nicely.”

Nuran wanted to be a public speaker on television. She connected her schooling to possibilities in her future that addressed her dreams of being like one of the role models she saw on television. The girls demonstrated the ability to value long term goals and also had an understanding that education is needed to attain achievement of those goals. Dilek speculated, “In ten years, finished my education and as a teacher in a high school.”

The aspirations of the local girls in Sulemaniya revolved around teaching and becoming media personalities (Tulay, Elif, Dilek, and Nuran). However, the young women in Istanbul (Songul and Leyla) expanded their scope of aspirations to political science and architecture. Songul said, “And to win the people . . . to be on the side of the people, to help.”

**Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 asks, “What are the social, cultural and gendered dimensions of girls’ experience in school?” (See Table 10.)

The girls’ experience in their families, schools, and communities are influenced by the social, cultural, and gendered dimensions of southeastern Turkey. The participants (girls, mothers, and officials) reveal these overlapping dimensions in their comments about everyday life as a girl or woman in Sulemaniya (see Table 10). By coding and
sorting the data through qualitative methods, the emergent themes in the data are revealed.

Table 10

Research Question 3 Social Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Dimensions</th>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Childcare, High Birthrate</th>
<th>Poverty, Child Marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahmet: We saw the reasons why the women do not have education and why people not sending children to school...economic problems, social views, ethnicity. They didn’t know why they had to send their children to school.</td>
<td>Ahmet: They weren’t sending boys or girls to school—no one. They needed to work in fields and the older children were watching the younger children. Mothers didn’t know any other way... They have ten children and Mom has a girl who does work in house, watch kids. It is not a problem for the mom.</td>
<td>Mother of Dilek: I am not giving her to marriage yet. Because I lived through it. It made me afraid, scared. It was ignorance. I have been a widow for seventeen years, these children are fatherless. It was difficult. We all have to pay rent. If there was school, if I had a job, it would’ve been better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dilek: The contribution?? is, it helped me to buy the supplies for school. We were freed from worrying about how to find the money for the materials. It was good.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scholarships and economic support. Poverty directly impacts the ability of girls and women to access school world-wide. Even when girl children are sent to school, the family’s economic condition can greatly impact the success and struggles of female students. For example, Leyla talked about living in a one-bedroom apartment with around a dozen family members of varying ages while trying to study for college classes. She dreamed of living in a dormitory as an unlikely and undesirable alternative, but understands her current living situation is a hindrance to college success. “If I live in dormitory, I will succeed. Maybe... I don’t like dormitory but in family living is
difficult.” She also laments her economic condition that results in isolation. Many of the college friends she makes come from affluent families. The simple task of choosing to eat at a restaurant becomes complicated as she understands that she must “look [at] my pocket.”

Several participants noted the relief that a scholarship can bring to younger students trying to continue to middle school and high school. Dilek is especially grateful for her scholarship: “The contribution is, it helped me to buy the supplies for school. We were freed from worrying about how to find the money for the materials. It was good.” Books, bags, supplies, transportation, uniforms all place economic pressure on families who desire to send their daughters to school. These expenses provide a perfect (and understandable) excuse for not sending girls to school.

Language impacted the growth and academic development of the participants in the GAP region. Being able to speak and write Turkish as a young child provided direct and smoother access for children in schools. Kurdish children struggled to learn the national language (see Table 11).

Gender imbalances of inequality and inequity stunted the ability for women and girls to access and complete education (see Table 12). The role of women in the family could prevent teenage girls from accessing education after puberty.
Table 11

**Research Question 3 Cultural Dimensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish Language</td>
<td>Leyla: When I was child, every child, Kurdish child, they can’t speak Turkish, because of Kurds are considered third class. Teacher speak Turkish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Differences, Lack of Community Will</td>
<td>Sevim: One of the problems is that the decision makers (governors, mayors, local officials) don’t believe enough in community education, they are just doing their jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Unemployment, Coffee Shop Community</td>
<td>Arzu: If you do that [give scholarship money to fathers instead of mothers] they will use the money not for the school, go out drinking, buy a packet of cigarettes or coffee house... because they are unemployed. Most mothers want their girls to get an education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12

**Research Question 3 Gendered Dimensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Imbalance</td>
<td>Mother of Dilek: If they send the girls to school it will be better, so the girls will not be illiterate, ignorant... if there was school, it is better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as Marriage Prospects</td>
<td>Leyla regarding eight-year-old sister with learning disability: She must, she must, go to private school but in Urfa private school there isn’t... When she is 18 years old, nobody wants to marry her. If she is a boy, she will go to private school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Value of Educating Girls</td>
<td>Arzu: If you do that [give scholarship money to fathers instead of mothers] they will use the money not for the school, go out drinking, buy a packet of cigarettes or coffee house... because they are unemployed. Most mothers want their girls to get an education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriarchal Hierarchy</td>
<td>Tuba: They do not accept women like me, because I talk about everything [good and bad things in the community].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three emergent themes. Three themes arose from the data that were not directly tied to current scholarship. These themes expand the definitions and terms of the framework for girls’ education.

Help others. Helping others was a strong theme in the responses participants offered during several lines of questioning. They answered with helping responses after being asked “what girls gain from education” as well as the “prime minister question.” The prime minister question was an organic question that emerged during the interview process: “If you were the Prime Minister, what would you do to help girls go to school?”

In the first instance, girls, mothers, and officials all provided answers of how the education of girls in GAP would improve the lives of others. Elif and Tuba offered that their own education could provide a means for them to help other girls, girls who wanted an education. Elif saw her dream career as a teacher to be a way for her to “parent” other children. “Because they are like fathers and mothers, they take care of us. They are hard workers.” Tuba, likewise said she swore to herself at an early age that, “when I get an opportunity, I swear, I will help others to get opportunity [to go to school].” And indeed she did accomplish this promise by participating on a civil monitoring group dedicated to helping more girls gain an education. Even the one male participant, the teacher, indicated that after observing the small number of girls in school he wanted to “struggle with the problem.” He was shocked to see how persistent family cultures and traditions dissuaded parents and girls in the region from school attendance, a practice he was able to avoid in his family of origin.
Songul’s quote summed it up, she said, “Most of all help young girls to their dreams.” She knew she had an important opportunity to help girls like her, who had struggled to capture an elusive education, attained their goals, met their dreams and make the most of their capabilities.

Development/Balancing of society. Turkey and GAP addressed the girls-to-school problem by introducing public relations campaigns (Haydi Kizlar Okula!) and by building more schools. My participants were aware of these strategies and their successes. One question that came from the interview process was, “If you were the Prime Minister, what would you do to get more girls to school?” I like the question because the girls at first did not have the intrinsic empowerment to participate in girls to school development. When I “magically” bestowed the power onto them, they had no more hesitation in their answers.

- The problem of getting more into high school? Make it a law that high school is compulsory. Nuran said, “I would make high school mandatory too.”

- The problem of not enough school seats? Build more schools. Elif proclaimed, “Then, there are girls who do not get education, you know the ones, I would open schools for them.”

- The problem of not enough family/cultural will power? Make it law and enforce, mobilize the community via more campaigns. Arzu stated, “Our supporters are private companies and individuals. We mobilize community to solve one of the main problems in Turkey.”
I asked Tuba if the girls-to-school problem was improving, she said, “Yes . . . 45% improvement, more programs, more initiatives.” She knew that the message was getting to the families who needed the most encouragement and support.

**Role models.** No girl participants mentioned specifically the concept of role models. The comments about role models came from three of the officials who, at this stage of their adult, professional lives, understand the importance of young girls seeing successful, educated women in their lives.

Arzu encountered her own discovery of possibly being a role model.

The girls gain, first of all the girls get the opportunity to continue their education.

Make some role models. This part of Turkey, people want to see concrete things.

To follow. Maybe I am one of the role models also?

I do not believe it had occurred to Arzu that she indeed was a role model, not just an administrator and coordinator of a scholarship. Although she understood the importance of the scholarship resources and the need for the scholarships, economically, she perhaps didn’t see how much of an important resource SHE was in the equation of getting girls to school.

**Synopsis.** The participants’ comments and stories contributed toward the excellent themes mostly related to the analytical framework and produced two emergent themes outside of the framework. The girls’ behavior is changing, they are challenging the status quo (agency), they have dreams and aspirations that they are working on with diligence and through multiple challenging barriers, and the surrounding communities of mothers and officials seem to understand and mirror the urgency and importance of these
girls continuing their education. Next, the focused coding process generated another dimension of findings.

**Focused Coding Themes**

The second level of analysis for the data included focusing the data across three categories: Girls, Mothers and Officials. These three distinct groups contributed to the interviews by revealing their thoughts about girls’ education in their families and communities. It was important to focus in on what they have to say and see if a pattern or theme emerges.

As illustrated in Table 7, each focused code neatly demonstrated three spheres of impact: individual, family and community. The themes that surfaced from these distinct spheres were important to contemplate in the analysis of the findings and provided clues to the value of future research and programs related to girls’ education.

**Individual Aspirations and Achievements—Girls’ Voices**

At the individual level, girls provided insight into the importance of education for girls’ futures. Research Question 1 was answered because girls tell us what they gain from more education. The focus of the study was to elicit the thoughts and dreams of girls. The girls in the study demonstrate that girls in developing Turkey understand the importance of education as a means to reach their goals. They desired a future that had a better life than the life of their parents. “I will have a job opportunity and I will have a better life” (Dilek). Dilek wanted to be freed from worrying about money for school supplies and other necessities in her future. She had a plan to become a teacher and she believed this aspiration was available to her through additional education. In addition,
girls-to-school programs impacted two other levels of society, the study showed how families are impacted.

Finding a Better Life for Families—Mothers’ Voices

Mothers shared the value of education in GAP families. Dilek’s mother indicated how much education could have helped her family and children: “If there was school [for herself as a girl], if I had a job, it would’ve been better.” So, not only was girls’ education an issue of concern for girls themselves, but the generational impact on the following generations was important to note as research in other regions has shown that educating girls was important for the economic stability of families. It was telling to note that during these interviews questions focused on the girls specifically, yet the mothers took the opportunity to share their own stories of being deprived of educational opportunities and related that to the urgency of educating their children. The mothers knew that education was a means out of poverty and saw their lives circumscribed by not having access to education. The desire to see their girls educated was driven by a desire to have them live a better life than their own. Because the mothers could draw a connection between their lack of choice in their own lives and the lack of education they experienced in youth, they surmised that ensuring more education for their daughters would provide more choices and a more empowered life thereby addressing the second research question, “How has school empowered the girls?”

Human Rights and Education for Communities—Officials’ Voices

Tuba and Ahmet illustrated the urgent connection between education and a better life for families and communities in general. Ahmet noted that parents and children “will
be much more comfortable . . . they will have more happy and good life.” He understood that once women received further education they were likely to have fewer children and more disposable income. Tuba pushed the “better life agenda” even further by connecting education directly with human rights. She said, “They will use their own legal rights. There will be no poverty.” Women and girls would gain control over their bodies, their livelihood, and their participation in civil society and therefore be more in tune with their legal and human rights. Ahmet and Tuba talked about speaking with families and trying to convince families about the importance of education. They demonstrated an urgency in their quest to get more girls into school during the interviews. As community leaders they desired success and prosperity for fellow community members, and as educated people they could see how effectively education transformed poverty into hope. In this third analysis of the data, Research Question 3, “What are the social, cultural and gendered dimensions of girls’ experience in school?” is answered by the girls-to-school urgent message from community leaders.

**Summary of the Themes**

This study aimed to learn about the lived experiences of girls in Southeastern Turkey and revealed their understanding of the girls-to-school issue in that region. The findings showed that girls have an instrumental understanding of the value of education and they also demonstrated an optimism and passion for finding solutions to seemingly intractable problems of getting more girls to complete education beyond eighth grade.

The most striking finding to me was the desire “to be free.” Girls wanted the freedom to pursue whatever potential future their hearts desire. They dreamed of the
freedoms that human rights, escape from poverty, and suitable careers could provide. The girls in GAP had maturity beyond their years and a sense of the constraints that could dash their hopes. These hopes and dreams resonated with the findings of other girls’ education research in different developing regions (Seeberg, 2011; Stambach, 2000, Unterhalter, 2007)

The most frequent finding revolved around the pattern that they must help other girls achieve further education and assist other girls in the pursuit of freedom. Songul said in beginning English, “Most of all, help other young girls to reach or have their dreams.” Both girls and their mothers understood that their plight to access and persist in schooling was shared by many others and they also understood that once they achieved their own goals, they were in a better position to help those behind them. Helping others did not rise to the top of other research studies in the girls’ education field. This was a new variation in the way members understood and responded to conditions in a social setting and will be suitable for further study.

Girls believed that their communities could be improved; they were optimistic. The girls in this study showed noteworthy insight when asked how they would improve girls’ education in GAP. They wanted more schools to be built, they wanted more scholarships, and they wanted laws that protected their rights to secondary education.

School empowered girls to engage in new behaviors and to make new choices for themselves. Some girls chose to protest; others made decisions. These girls felt

---

1 The quotes are accurate from translation and from my interpreters. Songul and Leyla are sisters and Leyla is speaking in English, where the English is broken and her Turkish is translated where she expressed herself in Turkish.
empowered to make career choices based on their own research and interests. Girls learned to use their rights and to express their opinions. These were particularly significant empowering behaviors given the challenges of the social, cultural, and gendered dimensions discovered in the study.

Poverty, language, and the low value of women stood out as the most substantial barriers to girls’ education in southeastern Turkey. The participants expressed their concerns about how low economic stability in families, coupled with Kurdish language skills, compounded the already weak standing women maintained in families and society. Additionally, men’s use of household resources hindered girls and women from access to scarce scholarship dollars. However, even with these complex and depressing circumstances, girls were optimistic. The participants believed that they cannot only overcome these obstacles, but also help other girls overcome these obstacles to pursue their dreams. The following chapter pursues a discussion about the meaning and significance of the findings and then provides an analysis of future opportunities of community action and scholarly research.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For each research question below I review the purpose of the research study and more specifically the intent of the research question. Then I review the findings briefly to establish the findings with a discussion about whether or not I was able to address each topic, conduct sufficient research to answer the question completely and thoroughly. Next my discussion includes a review of the limitations and delimitations. Finally, I share my recommendations to scholars for future study and potential actions in the field.

Confidence in Findings as it Applies to Research Questions 1-3

This study was a qualitative case study completed in two phases. I intended to interview girls and officials, however a third set of interviews emerged organically, their mothers. The cultural observations, interpreters, and literature review helped me situate the girls in the study. I was able to achieve my research goals of hearing and understanding the voices of GAP girls in school and also the voices of officials and stakeholders in the region.

The research focused on one province in GAP; however, my experiences in other GAP cities helped me understand that Sulemaniya may be a little more conservative than other GAP regions, but the issues of girls gaining access to school, overcoming barriers, and aspiring to a better life seem relatable to the larger GAP region.

By interviewing seven girls from more than one family, more than one grade level, and hearing from three cohorts (mothers and officials in addition to the girls) when carefully analyzed by open coding and focused coding, I can be more certain that the
knowledge collected carries reasonable weight. The girls I interviewed provide a valuable and reliable window to the empowering possibilities education can provide to girls in GAP due to the variety and the commonality between the participants’ responses to this research question.

Using a local interpreter in the bulk of the interviews and then using a domestic (US-based) translator provided several points of language evaluation for me to consider. I feel confident that the girls’ words are represented fairly and accurately, and that they also represent voices of girls in similar situations and locations. One of the reasons I am confident in my findings is that the girls’ statements correlate well with the empowerment dimensions in Seeberg’s findings in rural China. What this tells me at the theoretical level is that when we researchers listen and analyze the words of girls and young women, we can be relatively confident that they understand what is at stake in their lives in developing regions of the world, they are able to express their values and opinions to outsiders, and most importantly they are able to draw connections between their experiences as gendered, female students and the possibilities now available to them in their future.

Qualitative work does have limitations. For researchers interested in hard data, statistical analysis, replication, and other quantitative measures, this study may prove frustrating. The temptation to quantify experiences of girls, count instances of behaviors, or add up numbers of resources was not suitable to address the goals of this study. My research questions aimed to learn more about how girls’ educational behaviors and experiences impacted their lives and the meaning behind their thoughts and choices.
related to schooling in GAP. In this situation a qualitative case study was the appropriate approach.

Discussion of Findings by Research Question

The findings showed that girls had an instrumental understanding of the value of education and they also demonstrated an optimism and passion for finding solutions to seemingly intractable problems of getting more girls to complete education beyond eighth grade. This section discusses each research question by identifying the goals of the question, the delimitations (parameters of the case study), and limitations (any weaknesses) of the findings, as well as where the findings are situated in the literature.

Research Question 1: What Do Girls in Southeastern Turkey Think They Will Gain From School?

The purpose of this question is to understand what girls believe they can gain from schooling. By interviewing a convenience sample of girls from the Sulemaniya province who were at various stages of middle and secondary schooling the findings revealed three themes: To be Free, Ability to Help Others, and Well-Being. In these themes the girls demonstrated their understanding of their hope and optimism for a better future. This better future was achieved or achievable via continuing education. This brighter future also included freedom from poverty, harassment, and dependence on others. Not only were they aware of the connection between their own education and a better future, but also they understood that as they might achieve success in their lives, they could also benefit other girls’ and families’ lives by being leaders. Helping others is
a theme not found in other current literature about girls’ education. However the theme was strong in this study and noted as an emergent theme for future research.

Girls were serious as they lamented “girls who do not get education.” The girls also took the opportunity to answer the research questions enthusiastically. The participants talked about future careers, escaping male gawkers in conservative GAP cities, and dreams of independence in adulthood. They smiled when they talked about these themes, demonstrated confidence in their answers, and often beamed with optimism.

**Delimitations and limitations.** The focus of this study is delimited to girls going to school, in the context of extensive girls-to-school campaigns in Turkey from 2005–2010. The study design cultivated a 360-degree view on the topic via interviews of three perspectives: girls, mothers, and officials. This study focuses on what the girls believe they could gain from school, rather than how they conduct their lives within the school environment or how curriculum and school environment impact girls’ education.

The fieldwork and interviews give us a fair assessment in 2010 of in-school girls in Sulemaniya, experiencing barriers of poverty, language, family situations, and absences from schooling at puberty. This in depth research fills in the gap of current research that relies heavily on life or household data surveys. Additionally, the mothers of the girls in school provide a historical perspective of the cultural norms and gender barriers of those in the region who had little permission or funding (scholarships) to seek further education. The mothers demonstrate the underlying cultural, gendered, and social challenges that still thwart girls from going to school.
One of the limitations in my study were some difficulties of communication and long-term connection with the participants. It was impossible to know the long-term processes and pathways they chose, if they continued to pursue their education, jobs, or begin lives as spouses and mothers to which they aspired. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the process of self-reporting could have presented some limitations to the study. However, the diversity of responses to interview questions mitigated this limitation.

**Situating the study in empirical literature on girls’ education in development.** Since no other English language qualitative case studies in southeastern Turkey are available to date for comparison, this study cannot be compared to similar studies directly. However, the field of girls-to-school is one that is rich in geographical diversity (Ansell, 2002; Mehran, 1997; Mitchell, Blaeser, Chilangwa, & Maimbolwa-Sinyangwe, 1999; Ross, 1999; Seeberg, Ross, Tan, & Liu, 2007; Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004; Swainson et al., 1998). I can most directly compare this study to the work of Seeberg (2011, 2014; Seeberg & Luo, 2011, 2014) in developing regions of China, and Adely (2004) and her work in Jordan.

First, I analyze this work with Nussbaum’s profound question, “what are people actually able to do and to be?” (2009, p. 212). The participant girls in Sulemaniya answered Nussbaum’s question with multiple layers of understanding. They described what mattered most to them and how they envisioned accomplishing their aspirations via education. They stated that they were able to have careers and jobs so that they could be free from the constraints of poverty and hardship in GAP, and so that they could help
other girls to follow in their own success. They made remarkable statements of agency and gave powerful reminders of the liberating impact of education.

To reprise, the intent of this study was not to quantify the outcomes of girls-to-school initiatives, but rather to understand the impact on girls, through the eyes of girls. In this study, the GAP girls revealed their intrinsic values of freedom, their own definition of well-being, and their desire for a better life for themselves and other girls. Similarly, Seeberg’s research (2011) on girls’ education and empowerment in rural China serves as an excellent comparison regarding research intent. In her introduction, Seeberg stated,

Nor do we seek to conduct a conventional cost-benefit analysis; we seek, rather, to enumerate what matters intrinsically (Robeyns, 2006). Sen’s (1980) components of empowerment—wellbeing, agency freedom and achievement of various valued lifestyles—provide useful dimensions of analysis. (p. 45)

Another important theme that arose in this study is echoed in other studies on women and girls in regions where Islam is the predominant religion. In these regions, girls and women find it difficult to gather safely. Adely’s (2004) work in Jordan illustrates the importance of safe spaces for girls to congregate in predominantly Muslim regions as does Delaney’s (1991) Turkish ethnography, *The Seed and the Soil.* According to Adely and Delaney school provides this space. It seems that the GAP girls gained a more weighty freedom in education—it can propel them to larger, less conservative cities, where harassment is mitigated and economic dependence is reduced via employment.
Many United Nations and International Organization reports provide quantitative data on the number and grade level of girls’ education; however the subsequent efforts to improve girls’ enrollment in more schooling have rarely tracked or evaluated the perspective of girls, parents, and communities. The questions this research study assesses is related to the local perspectives of participants in girls-to-school efforts and the challenges they encounter with gender, cultural issues, and social conditions. More time in the research locale, additional access to the varied languages spoken in the region, and a larger participant pool may have delivered additional data to analyze, or perhaps reveal gender, cultural, or social issues not revealed in this study. However when compared to similar studies cross-culturally, the above issues that emerged in southeastern Turkey seem analogous.

**Research Question 2: How Has School Empowered the Girls in Southeastern Turkey?**

The purpose of this research question is to understand more deeply if the girls demonstrated empowerment as a girl who goes to school. Through the interview quotes, I captured the forms of empowerment the girls are achieving as agency and achievements or aspirations they have reason to value. The girls are making choices they did not have before schooling, and they are taking actions that girls out of school cannot reasonably achieve. They are clear about what they value (Research Question 1) and in Research Question 2 they demonstrate how they plan to conduct their lives to achieve the freedoms they value.
**Delimitations and limitations.** I did not frame this research to include the negative outcomes or possibilities of schooling. This intentional delimitation set up the study to explore the positive gains rather than the losses as an outcome of education. I did not ask girls what perils girls associated with education or with attending school. This study centered on the positive, affirming concept of capabilities.

My research relied on participants from one geographical location versus several separate cities in Southeastern Turkey. It is possible, but relatively unlikely, that the reluctance of some interviewees was particular to this location, for reasons unknown to the researcher. Fortunately, I was able to interview a variety of willing participants from a pool of officials, mothers and girls for the interviews that would mitigate this delimitation.

**Situating the study in empirical literature on girls’ education in development.** Relevant research studies include Seeberg’s studies in China. As mentioned in Chapter 2, research seeking to align with an empowerment-capabilities approach (Seeberg, 2011) must not only describe the girls’ voices, but also evaluate the impact girls’ educational experiences have on their experiences, actions, achievements and aspirations. Seeberg and Luo in 2012 categorized a part of agency among rural Chinese girls as “speaking up on own behalf,” a theme drawn from Kabeer’s 1999 work. One of the Chinese middle school participants said, “I’m used to being on my own. Now I’m assertive. I know my own mind and I stick to it” (p. 11). This statement reflects the similar sentiments of the Sulemaniya participants in my study whose statements fall into the agency categories of protesting, deciding, using rights, and expressing opinions. The girls in GAP were
pushing back against a conservative culture, making decisions that they deemed valuable or important, demanding human rights and dignity, and expressing their unique thoughts about the world in which they must become young women.

In Seeberg's 2011 article, the capability dimension most clearly connected to the voices of the girls in GAP is called “subjective orientation/positionality” which she draws from her own work and from Stromquist (1995). This capability is elucidated by a functioning called “ability to imagine social change for self and others” influenced by Unterhalter’s work on empowerment. When we examine her Chinese participants and my Turkish/Kurdish participants we can see that both groups demonstrated a subjective orientation by stating how they saw their own lives and their future families’ lives will be changed by continued schooling. One Chinese girl explained, “My schooling is to make me live a better life” (Seeberg, 2011, p. 55), and similarly the girls in my study reveal a laundry list of aspirations, from gaining knowledge to becoming a teacher through a college education. Both groups of girls (Chinese and Turkish) understood that poverty can be alleviated by having more education and better workforce opportunities.

When I analyze the methods used to answer the second research question I find enough variety in age and stage of education to allow me to uncover the ways in which empowerment might be achieved in the girls’ lives. They demonstrated great confidence and courage in participating in the study and sharing their education histories and aspirations.
Research Question 3: What are the Social, Cultural, and Gendered Dimensions of Girls’ Experiences in School?

The purpose of this research question was to reveal the social, cultural, and gendered aspects of schooling for my participants in Sulemaniya that may influence their lived experiences. The best way this research study illustrates these three dimensions of education for girls in southeastern Turkey is through the eyes of their mothers and adult officials.

The mother of Dilek provided the most revealing statements about how her life was influenced by the findings in this study, social, cultural, and gendered dimensions that she believed limited her empowerment. She lamented that her circumstances did not allow for school and that consequently she was unable to find work to support herself and her family. She also described the constraints of early marriage.

Arzu understood the limits of the cultural context in GAP due to high unemployment where men use extra money to gather in coffee shops. But she also stated that money from scholarships will be spent on girls’ education if given to mothers: “Most mothers want their girls to get an education.”

Tuba not only discussed her struggle to become educated as a girl many years ago, but now as an adult saw how her gender hindered her ability to implement change. She said, “they do not accept women like me” of her male counterparts in government and community circles.

**Delimitations and limitations.** The purpose of the study did not include other foundational questions for education in development research. This study did not
research how economic (macro or micro) dimensions impacted schooling, girls or families. Household economic data was not compared quantitatively with surrounding regions or populations. Additionally, the delimitations of this study neutralized political considerations from influencing the outcomes. Turkey is a longstanding democracy and the various political parties’ perspectives were immaterial with regard to girls’ education for the purposes of this study.

The influence of gender in this study was intentionally limited to girls and women. I did not study the impact of schooling on boys and men, nor did I study the impact girls’ education had on boys, men, or male institutions. A few male voices were captured in this study that showed a positive force behind some of the girls’ achievement and access to education.

The limitation of being a culture and language “outsider” presented a few challenges to the researcher. The gender dimension in Turkey could be further explored by spending more time in the CATOMs and NGO’s working toward gender equity in Turkey. Without constant interpretation for Turkish, Kurdish and context, the study concentrated on a sample of participants instead of public observations and group interviews. The number and diversity of participants in this study yielded a rich set of information and data for analysis.

**Situating the study in empirical literature on girls’ education in development.** Several contemporary scholars situate the need for research on girls in education. With respect to evaluating girls’ education, Unterhalter (2007) stated that those who write evaluations should look at “the condition of being educated, the negative and positive
freedoms that sustain this condition and the ways in which being educated supports what each and every individual has reason to value” (p. 75). The girls in my study stated the various freedoms they valued. They eloquently provided examples of the kinds of futures and goals they wished to accomplish. They drew connections between these goals and the schooling choices in which they participated and desired.

Nussbaum (2000) created a controversial list of core capabilities, closely related to definitions of activism for social justice and rights-based approaches to development. At the top if the list is education, which is a form of capability because “it enhances the opportunities of all to choose what they wish to do or be” (Unterhalter, 2007, p. 79). Both Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) argued that basic education reduces human insecurity, and this has particularly powerful effects for women in widening their capabilities. Similarly, the mothers in particular voiced their desires for their daughters to attain a basic level of education so they could pursue not only their dreams, but also their rights to a secure and happy life.

Delaney (1991) documented an ethnographic study in a Turkish village, describing the point at which girls and boys enter puberty in one village. She talked about how boys grow into men via a process where they can promote their appearance, flaunt their sexuality, and experience additional freedoms. In contrast, girls grow into womanhood through the covering and shaming of their bodies and the limiting of their freedom to the confines of their parent’s home. In contrast, the young women in this study clearly set themselves apart from the experiences of being confined and harassed in
the more conservative Southeast. They appeared to have no desire to return to the limits of village life.

Turkish women cited daily work burdens and economic hardships at the top their list of barriers that constrained their daily lives (Development Foundation, 1994). In addition, this same report stated that lack of transportation and distance between small villages and urban facilities (even small town facilities) prevented women from congregating, networking, and receiving basic assistance. One mother in this current study lamented how the impact of having a disabled husband compounded her lack of education, resulting in inextricable poverty. She demanded better for her daughter and son.

Stambach (2000) also used the voices of girls to describe their own experiences in a study in Tanzania. An entire chapter entitled, “Education is My Husband” included examples and stories about individual girls and the schooling and lifestyle choices they faced. These village girls viewed husbands as a liability and a danger. The Turkish girls did not talk about husbands as a liability, but they did express their desire to be independent and able to provide for themselves and their future families.

By using the voices of school girls, Adely (2004) illustrated the lived experiences of the participants in her research, demonstrating the gendered nature of the experiences of her participants. She linked these experiences to the lived experiences the girls face outside school, at home, and in the broader society. Her research enriched and informed academics and practitioners about the new “spaces” opened up to girls through schooling. The participants in my study linked an optimistic future and achievement to continued
The girls desired a better life, than those women who did not have an education. Many of the young women indicated a desire to help other girls attain a better life through education. Their mission was clear. They wanted to help girls.

**Conclusion**

This qualitative research study demonstrates the empowerment and capabilities that girls claim they gained in school in Southeastern Turkey. The girls and women participants perceived freedom from a hard life as a benefit of education; they enjoyed empowerment through the agency they gained from schooling and they were optimistic about their future experiences as women and members of their communities.

Understanding lived experiences of girls and young women in southeastern Turkey as they identified the freedoms, capabilities, and aspirations they gained from basic education may lead to appropriately designed policy and programs to address other education in similar developing regions.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

“I always believe there are girls dreaming….“ Tuba—southeastern Turkey, 2009

Turkey demonstrated the willingness and commitment to develop GAP via economic and social improvements in GAP. The government and private sector attention to girls’ education in particular demonstrates the determination and understanding that women and girls must be equitably educated in order for a nation, region and people to achieve not only economic viability, but also personal, familial and community progress. The challenge for Turkey is the scaling up of the efforts to reach all possible girls, recognizing the social, cultural and gendered barriers still facing girls and women in the
region, and finally exposing best practices in the field through rigorous research and evaluation. Scholars in Turkey and elsewhere need to continue to observe and analyze the progress of girls-to-school initiatives in southeastern Turkey in order to learn more about how the mix of culture, religion, democracy and tradition confound or propel regional development and gender equity for girls in predominantly Muslim, Middle Eastern locations.

Qualitative research that includes inquiry into the personal lived experiences in developing regions is challenging work. The perplexing logistics and difficult social/emotional components of gaining access to developing and/or remote regions should not be underestimated. Navigating safety, language, and intercultural exchanges while balancing the understanding of the researcher’s privilege and the participants’ personal experiences (in this case entering a home) takes scholarly attention to detail and compassion for the human rights and dignity of our informants. This study reveals the continued need to seek out a tender partnership between researchers and participants and a thoughtful balance in the midst of research, knowledge and empowerment.

Further research in this region has the potential to reveal the well-being dimension of empowerment put forth by Seeberg’s (2011) empowerment-capabilities approach framework. Had the research spent time following the girls through a school day or other school-based activities the line of questions may have turned more specifically toward the cognitive self-expressions (Unterhalter, 2007) related to enjoyment of learning, playfulness and self-respect (Seeberg, 2011), and related functionings.
Additionally, my line of questioning about “gain” may additionally lead the girls to consider more concrete answers as in income potential, decision making, action and choices. Further research with additional time to develop more long-term rapport with the girls might lead to questions about the girls’ inner world of personal insight and reflection discovered in Seeberg’s well-being dimension.

The lines of inquiry ready for pursuit after this study includes learning more about how girls relay their experiences to the girls “behind them” (younger sisters, other girls from their middle schools, high schools, etc.). Further examination of the role of mothers in girls’ education can also become a rich line of inquiry that has not been pursued fully in this region. Research should explore in-school experiences for girls and boys as well as any negative outcomes produced by Turkish educational practices or experiences.

Continued research in Turkey comparing urban and rural experiences of girls, violence against women and girls’ safety in schooling, and exploring the historical data available from mothers of girls will provide a valuable chapter to the depth and breadth of girls’ education in Turkey. To broaden the delimitations of this research, the social dimensions of poverty, birthrates and child marriage could be studied across different regions of Turkey.

The role of rural to urban migration in Turkey and other similar nations should also be examined in the context of girls-to-school programs. I would have liked to identify more young women from the GAP region who moved to Istanbul with their traditional Kurdish families and learn more about their experiences of transition between small rural villages and cities to a European, modern city of 15 million people as
intimated by Leyla who struggled to acclimate to the economic and social landscape of a large, urban university.

One population that I was unable to interview thoroughly were the fathers, brothers, uncles, and so forth, to gain a male perspective. Spending more time in the schools during the school year was another area ripe for observations and interviews in future studies as well. Time and distance limited the study to a case study format rather than a complete ethnography or longitudinal or comparative study of out of school girls and their mothers.

Each element of the third research question could be pursued as an individual line of inquiry. The cultural dimension of girls as members of the Kurdish community in Southeastern Turkey would be a foundational study examining the ways in which Kurdish traditions and practices influence the schooling of Kurdish girls. Additionally, this research could be conducted in one country or in several adjacent countries, including Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. A multinational approach could compare the experiences of girls and women in Turkey with other countries whose predominant religion is Islam. Issues such as early or childhood marriage is continuing to be a challenge for Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Nigeria, and Egypt. This type of research would enhance the depth of understanding of each dimension in the third research question.

The next fertile frontier for girls’ education in this region is examining the impact 3 million Syrian refugees have on Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq. In Turkey’s case, the social, cultural, and gendered impact will be of particular interest as Turkish men and
women encounter their displaced neighbors in refugee camps, city streets and businesses. Before the Syrian civil war, Syrians and Turks exchanged goods and services freely, but lived different political and cultural lives. Now that they are mixed together in Turkish society it will be important to analyze the impact.

**Implications for the Field of Girls’ Education Initiatives and Policy**

Several points of significance can be inferred from this study. First, NGOs can now understand that mothers are a valuable and reliable source to help girls receive tuition and fee benefits for schooling. Fathers are less likely to spend precious resources on their daughters when poverty and patriarchal pressures are prevalent in their community. Therefore stipends must be delivered to mothers or the school into safe accounts for specific individual girls to withdraw from. This prevents fathers from accessing or pressuring family members into misuse of funds and consequential school interruption.

Secondly, the very real struggles Turkey is already experiencing in providing enough classroom seats for K–8 cannot be ignored, but once the students reach eighth grade, girls in particular need to have unfettered cultural access to secondary education. This will increase the ability for families to provide social and economic stability for future generations. Stability is going to be increasingly important as the Middle East, Caucasus, and Easter European regions (all regions that abut Turkey) go through tumultuous challenges with religious extremism, political and economic challenges.

Finally, scholars and activists in the field of girls’ education should continue to listen to the voice of the girls themselves. Numbers and experts’ understanding of girls’
education can be enhanced by learning what girls will gain through education and what girls desire and dream about. Each girl is unique in her capabilities, but through listening to a collection of voices in a region, action can be taken to bring their collective aspirations to fruition. Additionally, the nuances, so important to the success of community programs, are often missed because girls are not directly involved in the planning and implementation of schooling initiatives. Girls need to be included on civil society monitoring groups, new school planning committees, scholarship committees and even involved in the retention of classmates when education interruptions occur. Girls are reasonably able to identify their own challenges and equally skillful to envision means to solutions. As Elif said, “Then there are girls who do not get education, you know the ones, I would open schools for them.” Elif understands that there are other girls who are not as lucky as she is and cannot go to school. She knows that the seats in schools are limited and she knows more schools need to be built. What are the adults waiting for?

Global and international organizations must provide the charge and sense of urgency for the expansion of girls’ education. My research suggests that the freedoms, agency, and optimism of a full elementary, middle, and high school education are desired by girls in critical regions around the world. These regions, including Southeastern Turkey, may generate important cultural, economic, and political advances otherwise impossible without gender equity and sustainable educational access for all children. Governments, private enterprise, and international organizations should work together to scale up school building projects so that enough seats are available for all children.
Additionally, the lost and silenced desires of adult women and mothers for a modern education should be delivered at night in empty school buildings, via mobile phone or CATOM-like groups to ensure their unanswered prayers for a better life can be realized. With the urgency and charge for global, compulsory, high school education, many women and girls will be able to reach their potential, protect their families from hardship and make inspiring contributions to their communities.

**Epilogue**

Scholars must continue to watch post-Arab Spring countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Tunisia, the American troop demobilization in Afghanistan and the exodus of millions of Syrians from their homeland. Troubled by the already gendered landscapes of education in these countries, research must keep track not only of the quantitative data related to GDP, school attendance, enrollment, and outcomes, but also the qualitative nature of schooling, puberty-aged interruptions of schooling for girls, and generational differences (between mothers and daughters and grandparents, for example) in these communities. The stories of girls in these regions do not need more inspirational books or TV movies; they need hard evidence of solid scholarly research that presents their voices and experiences in ways that can be analyzed and transferred into action by international aid agencies, local NGOs, and community activists.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

MAPS OF TURKEY (RESEARCH FIELD)
Appendix A

Maps of Turkey (Research Field)

Turkey

Courtesy of www.Pas.rochester.edu
Southeastern Turkey, GAP Provinces

Courtesy of Republic of Turkey Ministry of Development Southeaster Anatolia Project
Regional Development Administration [www.gap.gov.tr/gap-provinces/maps/provinces]
Sulemaniya and Soran Village, Turkey

Sulemaniya, Turkey (city) Population est. 800,000

Soran, Turkey (village) on Syrian border

Syrian Border (50km from Sulemaniya, TR)
APPENDIX B

AUDIO CONSENT
Appendix B

Audio Consent

Read and/or interpret to Participant/s: AUDIO CONSENT

I want to do research on girls education in Turkey. I want to do this because I think it is important to find out how girls education programs like HaydiKislarOkula effected local Turkish communities. I would like you to participate. If you decide to be a part of this research you/village/the youth in this program will be asked to answer questions in a small group and/or in an individual interview. This should only take a half hour or hour with me.

If you/ your village/the youth in this program participate in this project you will receive the opportunity to talk about your knowledge of/or your experience with girls’ education. You do not have to be in this research project if you do not want to. You can also stop answering questions and leave the project at any time. Taking part in this project is your choice, and no one will hold it against you or your village/program if you decide not to participate.

If you want to know more about this research project, please email me in Turkish or English at raanders@kent.edu. This project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please contact the Vice President of Research, Division of Research and Graduate Studies.

You will get a copy of this consent form.
Sincerely,
Rachel Anderson, MA
Doctoral Candidate

English: I agree to participate/let my village/let my school program youth participate in this project. I know what I/they will have to do and that I/they can stop at any time.

Turkish: Bu projeyekatılmayı Kabul ediyorum. Ne yapmamgerektiğinibiliyorumvediledigim zaman da bırakabilirim.

________________________________________________________________________
______________
Signature Date

Witness: I have witnessed the consent process and believe that the participants listed above have been fully informed, understand the project and their role, and have voluntarily agreed to participate.

________________________________________________________________________
______________
Signature Date
APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL
Appendix C

IRB Approval

June 15 2010

Rachel Anderson
Cultural Foundations

Re: # 09-278: “Girls’ Education in Turkey: A Pilot Study”

I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your protocol through the expedited (Level II) review process. Approval is effective for a twelve-month period:

June 14, 2010 through June 13, 2011.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB will forward an annual review reminder notice to you by email as a courtesy. Please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials. Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 330-672-2704 or Pwashko@kent.edu.

Sincerely,

Paulette Washko
Manager, Research Compliance, Communications and Initiatives
cc: Dr. Vilma Seeberg
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Appendix D

Interview Questions

Girls’ Education in Turkey: A Study
Interview Questions 2009

Q1: What do you know about the girls and communities touched by HaydiKizlarOkula (HKO)?

Q2: What is your connection to or knowledge of HKO?

Q3: What do you think the girls gained from HKO?

Q4: What do you think the community gained from HKO?

Girls’ Education in Turkey: A Study
Interview Questions 2010

Q1: What is it like to be a girl in school?

Q2: What do you hope to gain from school?

Q3: Why should girls go to school?

Q4: What do you dream about for your future?
APPENDIX E

GAP VILLAGE PHOTOS
Appendix E

Photos of GAP Village

Young girl in GAP village, 2009 (above) and sample village 2010 (below).
APPENDIX F

PHOTO OF OLD SCHOOL IN GAP VILLAGE
Appendix F

Old School in GAP village

Sample of Old School in GAP village, 2009.
APPENDIX G

PHOTO OF NEW VILLAGE SCHOOL
Appendix G

New School

Sample of New School in GAP, 2009.
APPENDIX H

PHOTOS OF RESEARCH NEIGHBORHOOD
Appendix H

Research Neighborhood

Research neighborhood, city life, GAP, 2010 (above & below).
APPENDIX I

PRIMARY ENROLLMENT RATES FOR SIX WORLD REGIONS
Appendix I

Primary Enrollment Rates for Six World Regions

In 1970, enrollment levels in Africa and the Middle East were still lower than in Europe 100 years earlier.

Primary Enrollment Rates for Six World Regions

Source: Darius (2013)
REFERENCES


Development Foundation of Turkey. (1994). *Women’s status in the GAP region and their integration to the process of development (Executive Summary)*. Project Director, Dr. Ahmet Saltik et al. Ankara, Turkey.


