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Girls Are Dyslexic, Too! An Autoethnography about Growing up as a Girl with a Learning Difference

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GIRLS ARE DYSLEXIC, TOO! AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ABOUT GROWING UP AS A GIRL WITH A LEARNING DIFFERENCE

by

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THESIS
Presented to the Graduate Faculty of St. Mary’s University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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GIRLS ARE DYSLEXIC, TOO! AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ABOUT GROWING UP AS A GIRL WITH A LEARNING DIFFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

GIRLS ARE DYSLECTIC, TOO! AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ABOUT GROWING UP AS A GIRL WITH A LEARNING DIFFERENCE

Georgina Gosen, M.A.

I was diagnosed with Dyslexia when I was seven years old and since then have faced a multitude of barriers and overwhelming feelings of being silenced or misunderstood because of the learning difference I was labeled with. While researching the topic of dyslexia for assignments I’ve had in my graduate classes, I found that girls are under-represented in disability research from education and psychology fields. Studies about dyslexia are often conducted with boy participants only or samples of more boys than girls, but findings from such research are often generalized unproblematically to apply to girls as well as boys. Using autoethnographic methods to recall, reflect on, and analyse my experiences with dyslexia past and present, my thesis explored the issue of marginalizing girls in research about dyslexia and propose new approaches grounded in health communication and feminist ethics of care that are attentive to and privilege girls’ lived experiences as students with dyslexia.
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Chapter One: Introduction

I was diagnosed with dyslexia when I was seven years old and since then have faced a multitude of barriers and overwhelming feelings of being silenced or misunderstood because of the learning difference I was labeled with. While researching the topic of dyslexia for assignments I’ve had in my graduate classes, I found that girls are under-represented in disability research from education and psychology fields. Studies about dyslexia are often conducted with boy participants only or samples of more boys than girls, but findings from such research are often generalized unproblematically to apply to girls as well as boys. Further, there have been few to no studies done in communication research regarding dyslexia or girls with disabilities.

Boys have dyslexia 2–3 times more often than girls and outnumber girls 2:1 in special education classes (Arms, Bickett, & Graf, 2008), but I argue that doesn’t mean girls should be marginalized in disability research or absent from the literature. My research addressed not only the problems I have faced but also that have arisen from my review of communication, feminist, and education and psychology literature about girls with disabilities and dyslexia (Chapter Two: Literature Review). Using autoethnographic methods to recall, reflect on, and analyze my experiences with dyslexia past and present (Chapter Three: Method and Chapter Four: Personal Narrative), my thesis explored the issue of marginalizing girls in research about dyslexia and proposed new approaches for health communication grounded in feminist ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982) and critical disability studies that are attentive to and privilege girls’ lived experiences with dyslexia (Chapter Five: Findings).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This critical literature review will illuminate studies that have been done in the fields of education and psychology about dyslexia in children and how often girls are left out of the research. I will also propose a feminist framework, ethics of care, that can be used in K-12 education to help teachers and dyslexic students, particularly girls, be more comfortable with and aware of learning differences and how they are treated in the classroom. But first, to understand my research, it is important to understand what dyslexia is and how I define it and other key terms in this section.

One commonly used definition describes dyslexia as,

a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (International Dyslexia Association, n.d.)

However, Klein (2009) had a different approach. She wrote a short piece in her final year as a trainee teacher where she explains that even though dyslexia is categorized as a learning disability, it’s really just a learning difference. A disability implies that there is something you cannot do. People with dyslexia can learn, they just learn differently. Like Klein, I understand dyslexia as a learning difference rather than a disability.

Further, “gender” and “sex” are distinct concepts central to my research but that can be easily confused. I adopt these definitions of sex and gender:

Gender and gender role refer to society’s idea of how boys or girls or men and women are expected to behave and should be treated. A display of gender, as with a gender role, represents a public manifestation of gender identity. It can be said that one is a sex and the other gender; that sex typically, but not always, represents what is between one’s legs, whereas gender represents what is between one’s ears. (Diamond, 2002, p. 323)
Dyslexia

Research by Hornstra, Denessen, Bakker, Van den Bergh, and Voetea (2010) showed that teachers often do not recognize the students’ learning efforts and expressed high or conflicting expectations regarding the students’ academic achievement, offering the students little or no emotional or practical support. Tsovili (2004) explained that anxiety-related symptoms such as lack of concentration, lack of interest and attention, distraction, emotional distress, tension, day-dreaming, phobias, fear of rejection, insecurity, and withdrawal were all common complaints of dyslexic students. One student said, “‘My teacher believes I can do better. She believes I have to try harder. I think she knows I try, but nothing seems to be enough for her’” (Tsovili, 2004, p. 82). The dismay felt by this dyslexic student suggests that dyslexic students need emotional support and reassurance and that it is not only educational assistance that is needed.

Something as simple as a few words of encouragement could have such a huge impact on a child who is struggling. Washburn, Joshi, and Binks-Cantrell (2011) found that the overwhelming majority of teachers acknowledged that they receive little training in how to teach dyslexic children. However, with the likelihood of 15-20 percent of individuals having dyslexia, it seems crucial teachers are given communication tools to use to get through to their dyslexic students (Dyslexia Center of Utah, 2014).

Looking at teaching from the perspective of a dyslexic teacher shows how beneficial a few words of encouragement can be. Klein (2009) explained that children need to know that having dyslexia is okay. Students need to be aware of this learning difference and what it means for their education; they need constant reassurance that they can learn. Humphrey (2003) found taking an indirect approach is the best way to develop students using methods such as reading classes, talking to counsellors, and educating teachers better rather than isolating the child. He talked about the notion that some children perceive that there are
education professionals in practice who refuse to acknowledge (or are ignorant of) the existence of dyslexia. He believed that to have a positive effect on pupils, teachers need to establish a warm relationship with them and possess desirable counselling qualities. One of those counselling qualities would be empathy. Empathy is defined as being able to appreciate the thoughts, feelings, emotions and experiences of another person and can be developed through “trying to understand the feelings behind a person's words” (Lawrence, 1996, p. 25). This shows there is a need for teachers to identify and address not only the academic needs but also the personal, social, and emotional needs of a young person with dyslexia.

Some teachers might not ever be able to fully grasp dyslexia and how it feels, but there are a few teachers who can use their past and personal experiences to help educate others. Glazzard and Dale (2015) explained that teachers who have dyslexia could draw on their own experiences to understand how to support learners with dyslexia more effectively, which suggests that they automatically have a more convergent approach because they understand what it feels like to be dyslexic and therefore make their teaching style more similar to children who have dyslexia.

Individuals identified with dyslexia may require different adjustments to enable them to achieve their full educational potential (Glazzard & Dale, 2015). Adjustments need to be considered as reasonable, or not, in relation to the needs of specific individuals. Exactly what these adjustments are might be difficult for teachers to identify when they have no real understanding of the issues confronted by dyslexic students.

Teachers who lack knowledge create continuous misconceptions, which can cause shocking decisions towards students that can be very unhealthy. Glazzard (2010) found that non-supportive teachers gave those with dyslexia extra work at play time, which led to them feeling isolated and left out. Supportive teachers treated those with dyslexia differently by reducing the amount of text that a child was expected to produce. Humphrey (2002) suggests
that some teachers lack empathy and patience, and some don’t even respect that dyslexia is a condition but think it is an excuse for laziness.

Research from Gwernan-Jones and Burden (2010) points out how dyslexic children feel and how teachers don’t understand, but there is a solution; researchers believe that more training is necessary or that children need better special education centers and that counselors can help. Gibson and Kendall (2010) point out that the lack of learning support as young dyslexic children grow up highly impacts their self-esteem and learning ability.

In one study that accounted for gender differences in how children experience dyslexia, Alexander-Passe (2006) looked at how dyslexic teenagers handle self-esteem, coping, and depression. His results found that females used more emotional and avoidance-based coping, which resulted in lower scores in general, lack of academic self-esteem, and moderate depression, whereas males had normal percentile self-esteem and minimal depression (Alexander-Passe, 2006).

Unfortunately, unlike Alexander-Passe (2006), most existing psychology and education research on dyslexia has focused mainly on middle-class boys, often from private all-boys schools. However, research does exist about the role of gender in K-12 education, a topic closely related to dyslexia that the next section will review.

**Girls in K-12**

Arms, Bickett, and Graf (2008) found that girls are marginalized in the classroom, that they are overshadowed by the more assertive, more disruptive behavior of boys. The authors suggested that boys are praised for taking risks and for their intellectual endeavors, while girls are applauded for being well behaved and remaining submissive to authority. “Socialized to please, girls rarely speak up if their needs are not being met” (Arms et al.,

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1 The terms I used here match the word choice of the author cited: Alexander-Passe (2006) used the term “gender” instead of “sex” to refer to “male” and “female” (versus “boy” and “girl,” for example). See my own definitions of sex and gender at the beginning of this literature review.
If success in the classroom for girls is defined as “being good,” girls with possible disabilities and learning differences may not want to jeopardize and expose their “weakness” or their need for special consideration (Arms et al., 2008). Therefore, many girls in K-12 with learning differences are not identified and don’t receive the appropriate services. On the other hand, boys’ classroom behavior, according to Sadker and Sadker (1994), cries out for attention, and this is particularly true for boys with disabilities.

Teachers are the gatekeepers for entrance into special education programs, and the primary reason for referral is student disruption in the classroom (Wehmeyer & Shwartz, 2001). In an article about gender bias and imbalance of girls in US special education programs, Arms, Bickett, and Graf (2008) suggested that “a low-achieving girl, who is not a behavior problem, may not be identified with a disability or learning difference because academic under-performance is often not a priority for teachers when referring for special education.” (p.352) The authors explained that teachers notice boys who act out, who cannot sit still and who disrupt the classroom; so, boys become the priority for special education referrals. This means that girls are identified for special education services only after they start showing behaviors similar to boys and behaviors that draw attention to them not because of their learning needs, but because of their blatant and inappropriate classroom behavior. So, with this generalization, girls are often identified with a learning difference a lot later than they should be, which can result in an unsuccessful school experience.

Girls can also face other obstacles such as sexual harassment in male-dominated classrooms as well as sex-stereotyped education and training (Arms et al., 2008). “Once in special education programs, girls were found to be pushed towards jobs such as receptionist or cashier, receiving gender-biased career counseling and sex-stereotyped jobs” (Arms et al., 2008, p.355).
Research shows that how teachers care and act towards children with dyslexia doesn’t only impact students’ school experience but will follow them around into their personal and professional lives (Goldstein, 2009). Teachers have a big responsibility towards children especially in times when children have just discovered that they are different from all their classmates and even family members.

Also, even with the seriousness of symptoms that are more prevalent in girls than boys, such as depression and social withdrawal (American Association of University Women, 2008), girls are not seen as in need of help as they are largely not disruptive in the classroom and will go ignored in special education services. As girls mature quicker than boys (Jans & Stoddard, 1999), they may be better at independently dealing with the disability affecting them without causing disruption in the classroom. “Girls’ tendency to work hard and mask their disability or negotiate the classroom by hiding their true needs may contribute to their under-representation in special education” (Arms et al., 2008, p.352). This demonstrates that how girls and boys cope is completely different and that there is a need for care in education.

In sum, it is important to understand how and why dyslexia experienced socially is different for girls than boys and those experiences cannot be generalized to both genders. This is where feminist theory can help fill a gap in knowledge. Using a theoretical framework of feminist ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 1992) to analyze student experiences could contribute to conversations in education regarding the ways in which gender is a factor among students who are marginalized for their “otherness” and to understand how identity factors (e.g., dyslexia) intersect during their academic journeys (Banks & Hughes, 2013). Using ethics of care as a frame forces us to see the constraints for a girl who has dyslexia and how using a feminist approach to education can have positive effects on a dyslexic student.
Feminist Ethics of Care

Carol Gilligan (1982) asserted that women and girls are socialized to make decisions in ways that enable them to maintain relationships and to sustain connections. This type of reasoning differs from that implied by traditional moral theory, where good decisions are made in harmony with universal principles such as objectivity and justice (Goldstein, 2009). Gilligan’s research on women’s moral decision making found that such abstract principles were not as highly regarded among girls and women, who largely hold more relational and emotional values such as interdependence, reciprocity, empathy, and vulnerability. Gilligan described the differences in moral values and development as a function of gender.

Gilligan (1982) outlined a process in which girls and women view the making of a moral decision in a different way and with a different voice than men, which is the “voice of care” (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p.397). Gilligan’s research was designed in response to her teacher and colleague Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1984) work on the stages of moral development in children. Kohlberg (1984) did not include girls in his research that examined the construct of “moral development” in a sample of all boys and later determined that girls and women are just “less developed” morally than boys and men based on a scale that equated morality with “justice” (Carse, 1996).

Kohlberg and Gilligan’s differences to do with the beginning of moral development fall along the lines of differences between traditional and patriarchal thought and feminist perspective (Owens & Ennis, 2005). “Kohlberg’s (1984) Stages of Moral Development represents the patriarchal view emphasizing the use of reason, form, rules, and means to seek objective truths as justice, whereas Gilligan’s (1982) theory suggests that girls and women follow a distinctive sequence of three perspectives in moral decision making.” (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p. 398). Each of those perspectives expresses a more complicated grasp of the relationship between self and other.
Gilligan (1982) argued that girls are socialized to make decisions differently than boys and in ways that enable girls to maintain relationships and to sustain connections. Girls are often more aware of their surroundings and how they should behave, which prevents them from being able to get the help they need. Ethics of care can provide a structure for how teachers approach their students and employ the mindset that “Children have different talents, interest, needs and goals, and should be educated accordingly” (Goldstein, 1998, p. 248). The next section explores how ethics of care can be used in education as well as how vital this theory is for educators to apply towards their students to achieve the most fulfilling learning outcomes.

**Ethics of Care in Education**

Feminist and education scholar Nel Noddings provided a structure through which ethics of care can be used in education. Noddings (1984) argued that caring should be at the heart of the educational system. This concept serves as the foundation for the theoretical framework of ethics of care in education. Nodding (1992) believed that the concept of school morality should be revised to focus on care as the moral orientation of teaching. “This feminist framework emphasizes the differences between the traditional male-dominated view of rules, regulations, and abstract thinking and the more feminine, “motherly” voice of context that seeks connection and relationship in interactions and decision making” (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p.184).

Noddings (1992) defines caring as a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization. Growth development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture and possibility (Owens & Ennis, 2015. P.393).This definition emphasizes that caring occurs within relationships. “Caring, as Nodding describes it, arises out of lived experience with caring relationships suggests that many early childhood educators are already likely to be active practitioners of ethics of care” (Goldstein, 2009, p. 247). So, early
childhood educators experiences in classrooms with children has shaped and informed their way of thinking about caring that shifts the notion, altering it from a personality trait to an intentional and firm act (Goldstein, 2009).

Noddings’ (1992) work allows early childhood educators to understand more fully the intellectual aspects of caring, and allows them to think of caring as the foundation for curriculum decision making. From Noddings’ work, she found that “the caring ethic suggests that teachers approach student needs from the subjective perspective of “I must do something” instead of the more objective “something must be done” approach. Teachers are motivated by this philosophy to perform conscious acts of “being with” and “doing for” the sake of their students” (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p.393). Noddings’ version of schooling includes the vision that each child will receive a unique education: there will be no rigid requirements, no mandatory courses, no huge body of knowledge that must be mastered. Nodding believed that children have different talents, interest, needs and goals, and should be educated appropriately.

Research shows that how teachers care and act towards children with dyslexia doesn’t only impact students’ school experience but will follow them around into their personal and professional lives (Goldstein, 2009). Teachers have a big responsibility towards children especially in times when children have just discovered that they are different from all their classmates and even family members. Also, even with the seriousness of symptoms that are more prevalent in girls than boys, such as depression and social withdrawal (American Association of University Women, 2008), girls are not seen as in need of help as they are largely not disruptive in the classroom and will go ignored in special education services. As girls mature quicker than boys (Jans & Stoddard, 1999), they may be better at independently dealing with the disability affecting them without causing disruption in the classroom.” Girls’ tendency to work hard and mask their disability or negotiate the classroom by hiding their
true needs may contribute to their under-representation in special education (Arms et al., 2008, p. 352). This demonstrates that how girls and boys cope is completely different and that there is a need for care in education.

Conclusion

In sum, studies on dyslexia are mostly performed on boys only, or the samples have more boys than girls, and the findings from that research are generalized towards girls. Also see Appendix A for a compact systematic view of studies mentioned in this chapter and the sex and/or gender characteristics of the samples they used. All this research can give us an idea of what can be done to help dyslexic children, but mostly boys. If the research was done with a more even pool of boys and girls, the results might look a lot different—much like Gilligan (1982) found when she studied moral development and decision-making in girls, who were excluded from Kohlberg’s (1984) research and development of his theory on the Stages of Moral Development. The purpose of this thesis project is to begin to fill the void in dyslexia research created by the exclusion of girls’ voices. In the next chapter on Methods, I explain autoethnography and how it will help me fulfill that goal.
Chapter Three: Method

Using autoethnographic methods to analyse my experiences with dyslexia past and present, I explored the issue of marginalizing girls in research about dyslexia and propose new approaches grounded in communication and feminist theory and ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982) that are attentive to and privilege girls’ lived experiences as students with dyslexia. In this chapter I explain autoethnography, why I chose it for this project, and what procedures I used.

Autoethnography: An Overview

“Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that uses a researcher’s autobiographical experiences as primary data to analyze and interpret the sociocultural meanings of such experiences. The ultimate goal of autoethnography is to connect “the personal” with “the social” (Chang, 2016, p. 444). As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. When writing an autobiography, a writer retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. Often, the writer does not live through these experiences just to make them part of a published document; instead, these experiences are put together using hindsight (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). When writing, the author will consult with texts like photographs, journals, and recordings to help with recall (Ellis et al., 2011). “Examples of this emerging method reveal that autoethnography has been used as a way of telling a story that invites personal connection rather than analysis” (Wall, 2008, p.39).

Autoethnography has been studied in multiple fields, including communication, health, disability, and feminist research. Examples of autoethnographic account can be read in the fields of sports (Holt, 2001), marriage and family therapy (Davis, 2005), art education (Bickel, 2004), mental health nursing (Short, Grant, & Clarke, 2007), and sexuality (Meyer, 2005). Some examples of autoethnography being used in research are described by Chang
(2016) where she talks about how autoethnography has grown drastically in health research since Ellis (1995) seminally published *Final Negotiations: A Story of Love, Loss, and Chronic Illness*: “Although she is not a health researcher but rather an ethnographically trained sociologist, her story of illness resonated with readers who learned about her relationship with and care of her partner dying of cancer” (Chang, 2016, p. 446). This influential autoethnography paved the way for the potential of illness tales and autoethnographies.

Since Ellis’ (1995) *Final Negotiations*, many more autoethnographers have written about and published their illness narratives and other health-related self-narratives, including “examples such as Muncey (2010) who used her lived experience of teen pregnancy caused by incest, and Muncey and Robinson (2007) exposed their mental health stories, as examples of the subjugated and disenfranchised voices” (Chang, 2016, p. 446).

Autoethnography in disability research was explored by Jones (2007), as she believed that traditional forms of narrative research were inadequate for helping people with disabilities find their voice and in order to add a voice of disability to the discourse, alternative forms of narrative inquiry such as supportive autoethnography need to be explored. Averett (2009) used autoethnography to understand her feminist identity better and to resist patriarchal standards that enforce male-dominant expectations of writing and research.

**Autoethnography in Communication Research**

Although somewhat rare in comparison to more established social science research methods, autoethnography has been used by multiple scholars for communication research. For example, Foster (2014) conducted an autoethnography regarding interpersonal communications and the use of a singular case to represent the general truth as well as the significance of a social context that research studies and their findings are rooted along with the need to attend to consequences. She found the autoethnography can “invigorate the
discipline and also serve to make our research undertakings more relevant and meaningful by connecting them to the populations that I believe we should serve” (Foster, 2014, p. 449).

Another autoethnography by Doshi (2014) explored her experiences through caring for her mother with terminal cancer. Her autoethnography focused on her narrative of the 48 hours leading to her mother’s passing and her insights and feelings about caring for the terminally ill. Doshi (2014) hoped that her autoethnography would highlight the lack of support systems available for the terminally ill in Mumbai, and that autoethnography could give people insight into the attitudes towards hospice care in Mumbai. Adams (2012) also wrote about the value of autoethnography in certain areas of and for specific purposes in communication scholarship: “Combined, the purposes of communication, ethnography, and autobiography illustrate one significant purpose—joy—of autoethnography: the ability to use reflexivity, storytelling, and aesthetic devices to investigate cultural texts, assumptions about relationships, and premises of human interaction” (Adams, 2012, p. 182). I’ll elaborate more on the utility of autoethnography, as described by Adams, for my research purpose below.

**Why Autoethnography for This Study?**

I chose autoethnography, as I wanted to embrace a raw and open perspective into what life is like for a girl with dyslexia. I hope to offer a new lens that develops insight about learning differences while unveiling how dyslexia has affected and developed me as a person, bringing to fruition the core of the problems and suggestions on how these issues could begin to be mended. Autoethnography allows me to have a voice in my research and be heard (Adams, 2012), where I feel other research silenced the pain behind my learning difference (e.g., Doikou-Avlidou, 2015; Burden & Burdett, 2005, 2007; Glazzard 2010; Humphrey, 2002)
As I reviewed in the previous chapter, multiple articles and sources of dyslexia research I read generalized their findings to girls as well as boys or failed to mention if their study was conducted with boys and/or girls as participants, which I found frustrating. Also, see Appendix A for a streamlined list of articles about dyslexia and the gender characteristics of their study samples. A lot of articles reviewed in my literature review discuss self-esteem, and it concerned me that researchers were comfortable to generalize that kind of research towards girls. The seriousness of symptoms are more prevalent in girls than boys, such as depression and social withdrawal (American Association of University Women, 2008), girls are not seen as in need of help as they are largely not disruptive in the classroom and will go ignored in special education services. As girls mature quicker than boys (Jans & Stoddard, 1999), they may be better at independently dealing with the difference affecting them without causing a scene in the classroom. “Girls’ tendency to work hard and mask their disability or negotiate the classroom by hiding their true needs may contribute to their under-representation in special education” (Arms et al., 2008, p.352). When I read how dyslexia was discussed as a disability in many of the articles included in the literature review, It would make me tense up; I hope that using autoethnography provides better insight into what being dyslexic is to me, as a girl and as a woman. How peoples misunderstanding and preconceived notions, no matter what age, can negatively affect how girls deal with their learning difference.

“Autoethnography creates a space for a person to use writing or performance to navigate pain, work through confusion, express anger, and come to terms with uncertainty” (Adams, 2012, p.184). Using things like writing as therapeutic processes that can help a person better understand, reframe, or work through an experience (Adams, 2012). A good autoethnography shows how and why the individual and the cultural, the micro and the macro, the personal and the political intertwine; addresses “gaps” in research; fuses personal
experience with abstract theory; provides an account to complement or counter pervasive cultural narratives; and offers a story to think and live with rather than sterile facts and findings to think about (Adams, 2012).

Further, autoethnography offers lessons that can be applied in everyday life. It brings together theory and practice, form and content and opens a new avenue that offers engaging and accessible texts for others to easily understand and use (Adams, 2012). “The first motivation of publishing an illness autoethnography is to tell the subjugated knowledge as a unique and important but previously untold, often oppressively silenced, story” (Chang, 2016, p. 446). There is a need for previously silenced knowledge to be brought out to the light so that others gain a new understanding about human experience (Chang, 2016). I hope to do this with my autoethnography to counter how dyslexia has been written about and treated previously in dominant research traditions.

**Procedures**

I practiced recall, reflection, and self-examination of past personal experiences and interactions I’ve had with others who have witnessed and been influential to my experiences with dyslexia. I collected data from a variety of sources, a mix of what Wall (2008) called “‘hard’ evidence” such as tangible artifacts and “soft impressions,” or memories (p. 45). Wall (2008) emphasized the role of memory and remembering in ethnographic research: “memories are collected about the experiences of being there and of the social actors in the field (Coffey, 1999). ‘Ethnography is an act of memory’ because fieldwork and the resulting texts cannot be separated from the memories that shape them” (p. 45). She went on to explain how memory is important in autoethnography in particular:

> Even when interview transcripts and field notes (or, in the case of autoethnography, diaries and journals) exist, these become combined with headnotes, which are memories of the field (Coffey, 1999). Headnotes include the impressions, scenes, and experiences of the field that are far too numerous to record (Ottenberg, 1990) and provide the sense of the whole that the ethnographer alone carries around in his or her
head (Lederman, 1990). It might be that headnotes are more important than field notes. (Wall, 2008, p. 45)

I collected this “data” in the form of artifacts, headnotes, and memories with the help of my family, particularly my mum. She had kept many letters I wrote to her as a child, as well as school work, I produced and journals I wrote.

My mum was critical in filling in the gaps for me where my memory could not stretch. She was also prevalent when I was reflecting from my journal entries, as conversations with her helped me remember more experiences and group things together, as well as uncover things about my past we might have not discussed previously. My sisters also played part in my reflections. My sisters were both lovely, positive reinforcements, able to conversate with me about certain memories. My father passed away when I was 15 but was a prominent part in my growing up with dyslexia. My mum was able to help fill in the gaps for him. With the help from my mum I recovered past material I wrote as a child to reflect on as an adult to gain more insight.

As part of my autoethnography, I also decided to journal about my experiences on my journey to write this thesis and memories it has brought up for me. I started journaling around the beginning of the fall semester when I started writing the literature review chapter for my thesis. My journaling was quite sporadic at first while I was in the process of writing my literature review, as I was unsure what I was uncovering writing two to three times a week, but by January I was writing three to four pages daily. I kept notes pointing out the ideas that emerged, mostly by highlighting the recurring words in my writing. I journaled mainly on my laptop as I found that the easiest way to keep track of what I was writing and organized my writing the most efficient way possible. My poems were written either in a poetry circle I had attended during the semester or from a health communication class I had taken a few years ago.
I periodically went back to reread what I already wrote and consider it in light of new journal entries and other types of evidence I collected, using the practice of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to help me identify the salient and recurring themes. Every time I re-read what I wrote I found myself gaining more insight and perspective into what I had gone through and was going through. I continued journaling and rereading and reflecting on my journals throughout the process of researching and writing for my thesis. My process of reading and rereading my journal entries and other writing or evidence was guided by Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) grounded theory and constant comparison methods as a way to increase validity of my findings.

Now that I have explained autoethnography as a method and procedures I used for my own autoethnography, the next chapter will contain my journal entries, reflections, poems, and other self-reflexive writing I did from my childhood and while I was writing my theses as part of my autoethnography.
Chapter Four: Personal Narrative

This chapter contains samples of self-reflexive and therapeutic writing I’ve done on my journey through my dyslexia as a child and into adulthood, including the journaling I did as part of this autoethnography while I was writing my thesis. I also included poems and excerpts of notes and letters I wrote (see Figures B1-B6 in Appendix B) and my family wrote (Figures C1-C2 in Appendix C) when I was a child that I was able to collect from my mum and use as part of my autoethnography, as well as other parts that I added for clarification later in the process of writing and organizing the final chapters of my thesis, such as the timeline below.

It is important that I fully disclose I received a lot of help with proofreading, spelling, and citations to maintain the quality and formality of academic writing in the chapters other than my personal narrative\(^2\) below. Part of being dyslexic is being able to accept that I need more help than other people and certain things will not be my strong suit. I am not ashamed to admit that. I believe the transparency adds validity to my autoethnography and further supports that when someone with dyslexia does receive adequate help, they are able to push forward and focus on the strengths of their writing and have the confidence to take on something as terrifying as a thesis.

The parts of this chapter after this paragraph I chose to leave unedited, I wanted it to be as raw as possible (Adams, 2012) and felt it was important to give an honest view into my narrative. I wanted to make sure it reflected my process, which was imperfect and impulsive at times, writing as things came to me, not particularly in order of the timing they happened. This is an open perspective into how I constructed my journaling, it might include grammar

\(^2\) I refer to the writing included in this chapter that I did and used for my autoethnography (journal entries, poetry, notes I wrote when I was a child) as either “personal narrative” or “self-reflexive” to distinguish it from the more formal academic writing I used to write the introduction, literature review, methodology, and findings chapters in my thesis. I also labeled and dated my journal entries and poems in subheadings in this section and in captions on handwritten notes and letters included as figures in Appendices B and C.
errors and I am sure spelling and formatting as well, but this section is about my experiences and hope those things can be overlooked as I feel strongly that such things shouldn’t matter when writing my personal narrative, as that is part of the liberation from my learning difference.

**Time line of events explained with help from my mum.**

- **Year one, Five years old** - I started Peterborough & St Margaret’s, a small private school for girls in England.

- **Year three, seven years old** - It was at this time when girls became difficult in groups. My Mum started to regret having sent me to an all-girls school since I clearly enjoyed playing with boys and being active. I would have been much happier playing football in the playground rather than the small groups of girls who started to become quite unkind and judgmental.

- Mum dreaded homework as much as I did. The mention of homework would morph me from a happy child into an angry and frustrated one. This could manifest itself many ways; sometimes crying, sometimes shouting, sometimes angry. I used to run to my room and sit in the corner and rock. Mum found it heartbreaking. She didn’t like seeing me so unhappy and it was very difficult to understand how to help. Whenever she mentioned to teachers that she wondered if I might be dyslexic because I seemed to be so frustrated and found things difficult when other children didn’t. Teachers played it down and insisted I needed to try harder.

- My mum felt for some time that I might be dyslexic but the earliest I could be assessed was age 8 so in August 2003 during the summer holidays we saw the first educational psychologist at the Dyslexia Institute. My mum told me there was never any doubt in her mind that I was very intelligent but that I did seem to find reading hard and certainly didn’t do it for fun. She noticed that I liked to write as little as
possible and that I made mistakes when copying. Although I was really happy to talk and tell stories, I just didn’t want to write them. I was a very happy child until I had to do homework.

- It was Year 4, when I was 8 my mum found just how much a teacher could affect the progress of a child. Up until now I had progressed with lots of encouragement, tried hard and enjoyed school, but that all changed with the woman that was my year four teacher. My mum thought she more than any previous teacher was very critical of my work and was the one who used to write all over it in red pen and make snarky comments. She told me It was a very unhappy time for all of us. She was not just an unsupportive teacher she was a bully, more so than some of the children who were making my life miserable and she had many run-ins with her and went to see the Head to complain. She made me stand with my face to the wall for the whole lesson because I had turned to look at someone behind me when they called my name. She said I had been disruptive and went red from her chest up to her neck! I had told mum before I went in that she lied and when she did she went red! When pushed further she admitted that I had done nothing wrong but that ‘it was the last straw and she had to make an example of someone’

- This added to my unhappiness in the playground. My older sister came home one day and told my mum she had had to intervene in the playground when I was being bullied. That there were teachers within earshot who had chosen to ignore what was happening.

- My mum did more research and found another school; Egerton Rothersay in Berkhamstead, it was a mixed school, with girls and boys. It was a school that devoted itself to children who had special needs – every child in the class received support of some kind. Not always because they found things difficult some of the children were ‘gifted’ and hadn’t been stretched enough at their ‘normal’ schools.
Egerton concentrated on getting the best out of every child. It believed in competitive sport. They were not afraid to place 1st, 2nd and 3rd on sports day whereas Peterborough was all about everyone just taking part, and if sport was where you excelled it wasn’t rewarded like academic work. In addition to sport Egerton encouraged music, drama and art.

I didn’t see out the end of the spring term at Peterborough because I was so unhappy. My mum reached a point where she couldn’t bare the screaming and crying every morning just to get me in the car to go to school knowing that I would spend the whole day being unhappy, so she decided to forego the last 4 weeks of term at Peterborough and start fresh after Easter at Egerton.

I liked Egerton and my confidence grew. I was there from year 4 -6.

- At the same time as I start Egerton, I started at the tennis academy as well. After year six, I did homeschool. My parents felt it would be better for me to concentrate on core subjects and tennis. As I was very good at tennis and sports generally, they felt it could build my self-esteem by concentrating on tennis and doing core subjects taught 1-1 which is how I learned best. I found being lost in a classroom very difficult and it seemed to my mum that there would be less stress on everyone and only a huge plus for me.

- I did homeschool from 11-17.

- When I was 14 I went to Florida for a different environment and a more positive experience at a sports Academy, while I was there, I rarely went to my tutoring sessions, and started to fall behind in my coursework. I had no interest in school and wanted to be a professional tennis player.

- When I was 15 my Dad passed away.
• I went back to England from my tennis academy in Florida, when I was 16 and had six months to pass all my exams to be able to apply for college. I had absolutely no interest in going to college, but it was what all my coaches had advised for the best opportunities, so I did intense tutoring for six months and got the grades I needed to apply for college.

• I spent two years at NCTC junior college in Texas before coming to St. Mary’s.

Starting to write (Journal Entry, 10/20/2018)

If I set my alarm for nine, that gives me all day to start writing, I’ll eat a good breakfast, and have a coffee to sharpen me up and I’ll just start writing and the organization will just fall into place, and once my boyfriend goes to work I will be fully able to focus. As I sit thinking about having to start writing with the dead line in big red letters in the back of my mind, my heart starts to flutter and my body starts to tingle and shake a little, and I am suddenly extremely uncomfortable and feel an urge to scream to let it all out, let out all my broken baggage that comes forcing its way into my delicate brain and thrashes around doubts and memories, experiences, other people’s words, and my own fears. It’s time to start. To write about things I have suppressed for many years.

Diagnosed (Journal Entry, 11/12/2018)

I was diagnosed with Dysleixa when I was seven but my mum said she knew when I was three. I hate the word diagnosed, it really irks me every time I tell someone I have Dysleixa or have to talk about it, the word diagnosed makes me cringe, It makes it sound like it’s a disease or something negative. When I was diagnosed, I remember I was one of the only people in my school with a learning difference. Shortly after I had been diagnosed, I had to go to special education classes twice a week, I would be pulled out mid class which wasn’t even the most humiliating part of it all. My teacher would write in the top right-hand side of
the chalk board Georgie – Special Ed class 2:30. And on Tuesday, Thursdays it would be there all day, for the whole class to see, that’s when they would call me special and make faces and talk slowly to me. Off I would go, to a secluded room to be given more homework, normally more frustrating the homework I already had, once that nightmare hour with the special ed teacher was done I would walk back into class, and everyone would stare at me and giggle, sometimes I would have to wait outside as not to disrupt the class. I would then not here about what our homework was and go home clueless ready to erupt and any second. I felt like every time I went to those special needs classes I got more and more separated from the class, and I missed the moments where people would ask each other to hang out after school or just chat. I became isolated.

**Anxiety and Anger (Journal Entry, 1/5/2019)**

I have always been an anxious person, I often had anxiety attacks as a child, I constantly worried about being liked and what people thought of me and being so tall I stood out, which is not what I wanted, I felt uncomfortable being different. When my mum talks to me about my dyslexia the first thing she will say is “you were just so angry”. I was angry all the time at everything, I saw things differently than all my peers and family and I didn’t understand. The easiest things for everyone else were the hardest for me. I remember when we would do our homework after school, my two sisters and I would sit around the kitchen table. A while would past and they would disappear to watch tv or go on the computer and I would sit there, my lips trebling and, the frustrating and overwhelming anxiety would consume me and I would scream and scream and tears would explode out of my eyes, my mum would run in and comfort me or tell me to stop it! If it had been a bad week. She would sit with me and try to help me but it was no use, it would normally have to do with a comprehension reading, those were the worst, instead of just reading the story I had to remember all these things and then use what I read and construct it all into sentences and it
was impossibly frustrating. When I read these passages and comprehensions, I saw it all differently on the page, the questions they asked didn’t make sense to me because I saw the story differently, I couldn’t recall what I read as many times as I read it, it didn’t make sense and I would start to feel like my body was on fire and I wouldn’t be able to stay still and I would scream again, by this point my mum would be in tears, her patience had worn thin, and she was as frustrated as me, she did everything she could but I was a ticking time bomb and we both didn’t understand it. That’s how I remember my childhood, crying and screaming at the kitchen table until I had pushed my mum so far that she would do my homework for me. Then she would hold me to calm me down, I would run of crying in my room, she would wait until I calmed down and put me to bed and I would have nightmares horribly violent nightmares, my mind didn’t shut off I couldn’t make it stop.

I constantly felt inadequate compared to everyone around me, I was the problem child, there were nights were I could make everyone cry, my whole family would line up to try help me and calm me down and one by one they would tap out. When I did manage to get though my homework that the teaches said would take about hour, when the reality for me was I started it when I got home and two hours later it would be put aside for dinner where I would sit miserably and then it would continue for the next two hours before I would go to bed and my mum would say “we will try again in the morning, it will be a new day”. I would be woken up by my mum and just feel fear, afraid of facing the teacher and the rest of the class to talk about the homework that I didn’t understand, dreading being called upon and saying the wrong thing or getting my sentences and words jumbled up as I talk and everyone laughing at. Having to face all those girls that didn’t like me and found me weird and stupid. Often wasting an hour trying to make myself throw up so I wouldn’t have to go , this was a reoccurring thing I did, I would tell my mum I was sick and didn’t feel well I would do anything to not have to face school, to my disappointment my mum caught on to this and I
would have to go to school, sometimes she would call back up reinforcement from my dad who would say ‘don’t let the bastards get you down kiddo’ and of I went on the most excruciating ten minute drive to school where my older sister would be sitting in the front so happy and excited to see all her friends and go to class, and I would sit staring out the window and beg my mum not to make me go in there. My older sister would leap out the car and walk off and I would stare at my mum with my eyes welling up begging her, if I don’t go today, I promise I will go everyday this week and not try anything, that I just needed more time to finish the homework and I didn’t want the teaches to be mad at me and the girls to beat me up in the playground and talk to me really slow like I was dumb. My mum would drive off crying too.

As I write this I suddenly from nowhere start crying, tears streaming down my face, I haven’t thought about getting out the car for school every day in years, as an adult looking back it was such a raw horrible experience that I went through with my mum daily, and just writing this I can see her face in my head and it makes me so sad, I never realized she was just as lost as me, just as frustrated and angry and she didn’t want to make me go in there and be terrorized by my teaches and peers she wanted to let me run free and play sports and write my creative stories and do it my way, she wanted the Georgie that would appear smiling and giggling making her laugh and telling her how much I love her not the Georgie that wouldn’t speak because when I did I would just cry and say I hate myself and I don’t want to be here. It aches to relive those memories to think about how sad I was, at nine years old I was telling my mum I wanted to kill my self, that everyone’s lives would be easier if I wasn’t here, I made life so hard on my whole family, I ruined dinner, bed time, breakfast, school runs, I would look at my perfect sisters and feel so separate, difficult, was a word that was throw around a lot. In school and at home. Everywhere I turned I was around people that found it all so much easier than me. I would be the last one to finish reading and then when questions
were being asked I could never remember enough to answer, and constantly to my horror the teacher would ask me questions and my heart would jolt and I would tighten my fits as hard as I could sometimes so hard that they would bleed from the pressure of my nails penetrating my skin, and I would say ‘I don’t know’ and pout not making eye contact with anyone, and no one would save me, instead I would hear sniggering. My teacher would then humiliate me by making me read the passaged I was being quizzed on in front of the whole class and I would stutter my way though skipping and repeating lines and mispronouncing words until I had so much water in my eyes that I couldn’t see the letters dancing around at all anymore. Before I would have a chance to wipe away my tears the teacher would say ‘there is no need to make a scene it’s a very simple question, its all right there in what you just read’ and would call on one of my classmates who would answer it with perfect precision. The bell would ring, and I would take this nightmare reading home with me to finish and the kitchen table alone, unlike my other classmates who would go to each other’s houses, not me, I was no use to anyone. I would even be clueless about the answers or get angry and throw a tantrum as the teachers would say. On top of that was all this was the extra work I would be giving by my special ed teacher, who had zero patience with me and I would often hide in the bathroom while she came to find me. Everywhere I turned there were people looking right through me, its like they thought I was like this on purpose, they all made it seem like I enjoyed being humiliated and turning in crusty homework with tear marks on them. That I couldn’t wait for the looks on their faces that screamed lost cause.

Math (Journal Entry, 2/22/2019)

Spelling and writing and reading, have always been impossibly hard. I hadn’t really written about math as everyone in my family was bad at it, we all hated math, there was no one running to help me with my math homework. My dad owned a business and didn’t know how to do half the math homework I bought home. It does affect me every day, struggling
with math a numbers, in a multitude of ways. From having to recover passwords when
logging into something and not being able to copy the recovery number they sent quick
enough to unlock it, or adding my total scores when I play games with my boyfriends family
and feeling mortified when I have to take out my phone and do the ‘simple’ calculations on
my phone. Constantly getting my debit card numbers mixed up and blocking my card
because I had put the wrong number in so many times, struggling to time things when
cooking because I can’t figure out the math. Writing tennis articles for my job and getting all
the scores mixed up as the numbers chase each other around the page. Creating game day
scripts for basketball games and crying as I try to change and organize specific times for
when things happen, using multiple pieces of paper to trying a figure out the math and getting
so frustrated because my brain just wont let me and I have confused myself to the point of no
return. College Algebra was histerical for me, I really thought someone was playing a joke on
me, numbers, letters and symbols! Was horrible, I would lose marks for the workings I had
done as they were not how the professor taught them, even though I got to the same exact
answer. I would try to explain to her how I got to where I did and she would say its
impossible, or I was overcomplicating it and make it more difficult for myself. Which for a
‘normal’ person might have been true, but for me it made since that way. I would also get the
right answer but put a – instead of a + and lose points again I would show the professor how I
got there, but I didn’t matter. I dread the moments when I have a child and they come home
with their math homework and I can’t help them, that thought terrifies me.

Sports and Theater (Journal Entry, 2/1/2019)

Theater was something I absolutely loved when I moved to my second school. That
was mixed. For the years I was there I started in all the productions and absolutely loved it,
not a bad memory on that stage, we did a rendition of a mid-summer nights dream which my
best friend and I still sing to each other jokingly from time to time. I was a simpler version of
Shakespeare, written for a younger audience and in a simpler way that we all understood. Theater gave me so much confidence, new ways to express myself, I loved the repetition of it all, I loved the learning through doing and found myself able to remember lines and lyrics.

One summer my older sister and I did a theater camp, she is a brilliant singer and was often in big productions of Chicago and Fame. We both auditioned and I didn’t make the cut. The theme of the show was x-factor. I got a last minute offer into the girl group and flat out refused as that was my worst nightmare, so I went back into the room with the casting people and asked them if I could be really bad on purpose as they looked at me confused I explained to them that to make this like the real X-Factor they have to have the funny terrible act, and I wanted to do that, I sung twinkle twinkle and Barbie Girl and put on a funny production and made people laugh while my sister, headline the whole thing and won. When I look back, that’s one of the moments I like to reflect on and talk about, it was a real Georgie thing to do, it’s one part of me I really liked.

My mum told me that I was naturally gifted at anything which required movement; swimming, ballet, ball skills, tennis. The ballet teacher begged my mum not to let me give up. The swimming teacher thought I had huge potential.

In the mist of my early education years I found sports, my saving grace. My thing, my thing that no one could take from me, so fast they couldn’t catch me so strong they couldn’t beat me. I loved sports, I was good at it, I had athletic ability that the girl who got A’s in everything didn’t have. I got to take out all my anger sprinting to the finish line, I was also insanely competitive. I once I came first, in a race or an event or won anything all the school and the bullies would disappear from my body and I just felt good, like I belonged, proud and happy that I couldn’t do something better than someone else. Sports was where I excelled no math and spelling in sports, I felt like on one could touch me and suddenly, my mum and dad
were smiling, I had something to come home and tell them about. My dad always wanted a boy and I was as close as he got, and he loved more than anything that I was an athlete and that smile on his face when I would come first in sports day was contagious. My sisters weren’t athletes, I was! I didn’t compare myself to them when it came to sports and my confidence started to build and when it was PE day I was pumped. Unfortunately the school I was at didn’t care too much for athletes it was all about academics that’s where the competitiveness was. However, shortly after I found tennis. My mum loved it and her friend worked at the academy and so I started to go a few times a week, I hated it at first found it horribly boring and I wasn’t good which was extremely frustrating. But soon I was to find that I could hit the ball hard and oh it felt so good. There was one drill my coach would do with me, when I would show up for a lesson and my coach would ask about my dad sometimes I would frown or shrug and he would tell me to take it out on the ball and oh I did and I hit them as hard as I could and it was awesome. I felt alive and relived and my anger slowly got better, I was allowed to be angry on the tennis court and aggressive, the coaches liked that and found it funny. I used it all to my advantage and suddenly I was good, and there was no feeling like hitting a winner.

Tennis helped me become my own person and it was my outlet, and it was mine and no one could touch it. It didn’t involve school, I had to problem solve and think on my feet and do the same motion 500 times to get it right and it was repetitive, and I was in control. It saved me from the bullies and the teachers, it helped my family be happier and it gave me confidence.

Unfortunately one coach came into my life and did more damage than all my teachers put together. I became his target, and he would often refer to me as a retard and suddenly tennis was no longer my safe haven, it was a whirl wind of anxiety and humiliation. It started with having to pick up 25 balls and I would mis count them, and he would fling them all off
my racket and make me count in front of the whole squad. My secret identity had been reviled in the only place I felt like everyone else, I couldn’t keep track of scores and points. I would always forget, it was hard to keep it all organized in my head. One memory that is burned into my scull and still affects me to this day is time, telling the time.

I am about 11 years old traveling on a tennis tournament, We are at dinner eating chatting away there are about 20 of us, my coach calls me over he stares at me with a smug look on his face, the adults who seem to know something bad is coming my way tense up, me oblivious to what is about to happen has a big smile on my face. He stops and says the words I dread to hear “What’s the time”? I look at my baby G which my mum purposefully bought me to avoid such damaging issues and he laughs while everyone else stares “no, look at mine, what is the time”? I feel a rush though my limp body my lips start to quiver and shake, “I can’t read that” I said “he called me fucking retard and an embarrassment and I had to go sit at a table by myself while he informed the restaurant that I was to special to sit with everyone else. Unfortunately to this day I can’t stand looking at an analog watch and when I do ware the beautiful watch my boyfriend gave me, him unaware of my traumatic experience, I fear for when someone asks me the time and I take a few seconds to long. Every time I look at an analog clock that moment plays over and over in my head. I feel like a nine year old, so stupid and small.

**College Experiences (Journal Entry, 2/5/2019)**

Why do you deserve to be treated special?

One of my worst experiences in college, was my senior year crossing off the last of my core classes, literature. The one I put off as long as I could. I had heard great things about this professor and how easy he was, I thought I was in luck. Funny how I always forget my peers idea of easy and mine weren’t quite the same, as I soon figured out. The reading load
wasn’t all that bad, quite interesting actually, there were tests but they were manageable as long as you had read the short story, which often managed to keep my attention, although I would have to read it multiple times, which was pretty normal for me. But then it came to the paper, we were given the prompt for our paper, and we had to write about one of the story’s we had read and we had to cite five sources. I struggled, I didn’t really understand the story and couldn’t connect things together. When that happens I panic, it’s such a familiar struggle I have when writing about something I read. Having ideas or thoughts in my head but then not being able to take what’s in my head and putting it down on paper, it’s incredibly frustrating and normally ends in a panic attack, it is the most simple talks that usually set me off, and it can be quite scary. A lot of my peers cannot understand the effects that not understating has on someone like me, It makes me feel utterly useless. I am lucky however to have an amazing support system from my mum and sister who are always on the other end of phone and have been through this with me a million times, my older sister is the smartest person I know she could bang out a paper in a few hours, she is incredible and could always help me talk through my ideas and give me a plan, as she did with this and I could send it back and forth to her and she would help me group things together, we would facetime and I would cry and cry and through the tears I produced a paper. I got my grade back and my citations and spellings were the issue. I had misunderstood his instructions about the citations, apparently accused him of lying and was told to listen more carefully.

Another struggle of being dyslexic I find it difficult to process information as soon as it is told to me, one of my most trying setbacks. I did something I normally don’t do, I went to talk to him about my grade and ask what I could do to make it better. I was so frustrated about the issues with my citations. I explained to him the difficulties I was having and that I found in instructions unclear and hard to follow and that I had misunderstood and it got jumbled in my brain. I explained how I was dyslexic and this was part of the struggle, I told
him I would get it him the letter that proved that I was dyslexic and, he told me he didn’t need it, I continued to explain how hard I worked on this paper and that I found it difficult to do it in the time frame I was given, I asked if next time I could be given the prompt earlier and then give him a draft of my paper so he could look it over and let me know if I need to make changes or if there was something I missed. He gave me a smug smile which I am all too familiar with and said, “so you want to cheat?” “How would that be fair on the other students if you get the prompt earlier than them” “if I follow the instructions properly then I would be fine.” This made me overwhelmed with frustration and my lips started to quiver, I wasn’t going to cry in front of this man but I had this overwhelming consciousness of every experience I had every had with a teacher or professor not understanding my learning difference and making me feel like the smallest person in the world that tears started streaming down my face as I quivered “you just don’t understand” and all he had to say was “give us a smile” and that was it.

It is confusing having Dyslexia, for everyone involved. Some days I don’t have a worry in the world, I can sit and read and write and flow just like that. There are other days where even the thought of reading and writing makes me feel ill and I feel incompetent and like I don’t deserve to be at college, that I’m a fraud and have somehow cheated my way here, because how could I be able to do this.

What goes on In my mind (Journal Entry, 11/24/2018)

I worry, when im worried. I know everyone can sit it, I can’t hide my worry. Which doesn’t surprise me, because what they aren’t seeing is, the paralyzing frustration and panic going on inside my brain, my brain that is scattered and disorganized, that will never work how I want it to. I am so exhausted from trying not to scream holding back the tears from my eyes as my lips quiver uncontrollably, can they see? If they can why does no one help me.
HELP! I am spiraling in my brain and it wont stop. I feel like I cannot accomplish anything and I shouldn’t be there, I am not smart enough.

That I have no idea what I am talking about and they will think I am dumb and I will stumble on my words and they will laugh as I stutter and I will feel so stupid and paranoid like everyone is judging me. I am trying, but sometimes it is just to hard and I don’t feel good today, its all that much harder today and I am centrophobic in my own mind and I just want to get out for a little while.

I am scattered brained and panicked. I find myself In the car ride home from class quite, zoned out before my boyfriend brings me back, putting his hand on my leg and smiling at me. I look at him and I want to cry, I know If I speak.. I will cry or I will say something rude or unnecessary because in this moment everything is wrong and I am so full of anger and disappointment in myself and I need somewhere to put it, so I don’t speak… He asks me if I’m okay I say yes and force a smile. He tells me not to stress I laugh and say I won’t… We make it inside and I pace around until he leaves for work. The door closes and I sit to carry on the work that has consumed me in our car ride home. I sit and I sit for hours reading and jumping from page to page taking notes, deleting them, copying from another doc, pasting, moving it, up then down, then adding on, then deleting, going back reading more, adding, deleting, copying, pasting, editing, exiting out completely. I stop... as if I have just taken a breath for the first time in hours and I sit numb, no tears, no emotion just chilling numbness. My eyes to tired and dry to produce tears, I just feel it building inside me, knowing it will get me another day.
My Mum (Journal Entry, 2/5/2019)

I survived because I had forgiving parents and the most caring mother in the world that went to great lengths to protect me and make sure I didn’t give up just because the education system didn’t accept my strengths.

When I started to write about my Dysleixa, I was writing angry, frustrated and tired; and those words stood out in all my reflections as well as misunderstood and thrown away, pushed to the back of the classroom and difficult. I was angry with the world, with my teachers, professors, tutors, friends, bosses. I wanted to figure out why, and how they were so unaware of what I was going through. I would write three-page rants in overpowered anger about these people who had my education in their hands and who I felt had let me down and slowly chipped away at my confidence and willingness to learn. What could I do to get these people to understand what it was like to be me, if only I could show them what it was like in my brain. To read about the links between Dysleixa and low-self-esteem and depression and how it is way more prevalent in girls than boys, but not researched beyond that statistic, really hurt me and resonated with me straight to my core. I suddenly looked beyond the anger and resentment that I held towards these people and looked beyond at what was always right there picking me up and pushing me forwards when I didn’t want to keep going. My mum. Since I was a child I suffered depression and crippling anxiety, but I didn’t realize the extent of it until recently. This all came to fruition over Christmas break when I went home to England. I was beginning to lose my patience with my mum over the course of the semester as I wanted letters and things I had written as a child to help with my reflections and she told me she had some and would send them and felt like she was giving me the run around. So when I was home and told her I would take them back to read them after break she, stopped and stared at me and said I am not letting you read these by yourself, I don’t think you understand what you used to write, I will let you see them if we read them together. My heart
started to flutter and break as I looked at her face, she looked so hurt and saddened as she passed them to me. I suddenly felt like I little kid, telling her about my day.

I got hit with a wave of emotion, here I was, just trying to write about me and everything I have suffered and faced, but the things I can’t remember from when I was young, the notes I don’t recall writing, she has them burned into the back of her brain forever, she remembers them so clearly that it makes her tear up just thinking about it. She hurts for me and has since it all started, she wants answers just as much as me, and if it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t be writing this right now, she went to great lengths to beat the system and not conform to grades and tests.

**Dinner Time (Journal Entry, 2/14/2019)**

Circus, cu..ieh..ruh..cu..ou.ah.s.. even as I write I still have to sound it out, just like that. It’s one of those words that haunts me. It was one of my trigger words at the dinner table. We would sit there, my mum, Dad and two sisters, me the middle child and we would all talk about our days, fight for my dad’s attention. My older sister and dad would discuss the news and politics while I would sit there staring off in to space and then my little sister would jump up, ‘Dad, Dad, quiz us! Ask me about my times tables!’ as she would say this my mum’s face would tense up as if she knew what was already coming. I would already get angry knowing the out come of this horrible game, and suddenly my older sister wasn’t so chatty.

My older sister was extremely intelligent amazing and English, history, politics she excelled at it all, but not math, my little sister at this time was working on it in school. Then there was me, I could make you laugh, tell a good story but talk to you about the news, let alone answer a math question. absolutely not! My competitive edge would always over take me and I would participate, my Dad would ask the first question, my older sister would use
her air pen to try and figure out the math problem using the table as an invisible sheet of paper and as her mind was getting to the answer my litter sister would yell it out, while I was still trying to remember the numbers he had even said in the first place. That was it… my older sister left the table and my dad would say one down two to go and laugh, surprising sometimes this game did end well, and we would all get one right and it was fun, and what my mum would never understand is that It wasn’t something my dad started but one of us would initiate this. So here we were my little sister and me, I secretly smug that no one seemed to notice I too answered the last question wrong. I sit ready for a times table question, I was sitting with for the nine times tables the only one I could remember and my mum taught me the cool way to do it on my hands. Here we go, he looked to me with a half smile…

‘Georgie, spell circus’.. I must have tried 15 times and he would sit and calmly say, try again, and I would try and try lips quivering, before I would run of crying. My dad never played this game to be evil, it was funny, it was funny for the person who won at least. Those dinners taught us a lot, as I get older I miss them more and more, we were all quite outspoken and loud, my dad who had always wanted sons was surrounded by women, outnumbered. He wanted us to be big, to have a voice and an opinion, to care about things, and to entertain, and most importantly be able to make fun of ourselves, and I learned that the best sitting at the dinner table. As we got older that game slipped away, it became more about the news and what was going on, so on the train on the way home from tennis practice I would read the paper and I would get ready to discuss what I had read. We would sit and I would wait for my dad to be talking to my mum about it and before my older sister had a chance I would step In and talk about what I had read and my dad would ask me what I thought and it was amazing to me. The funniest part was that I had spent the 45 minute train ride reading the same article over and over until I could remember enough, so I had to go first before my older sister took
it from me. I didn’t have to spell or do math, I just had to have an educated option, my own thoughts.

**My Dad (Journal Entry, 2/13/2019)**

My dad did awful in school, not that he would have ever admitted that, but my mum had come across his report card recently and we all laughed. My dad was extremely intelligent, he had a amazing character and if he walked into a room you would know about it, her was hilarious and always had people eating out of the palm of his hand, he was a fantastic business man, but not a good student. He misbehaved, talked back and was the class clown. He always told me that personality can get you just as far as brains if not further. He taught me how to work hard and not let my adversities define me, he would make fun of me to the point of tears and then make me make fun of my self and told me that’s how I would beat all these bullies and the teachers and the people that made me feel inferior, he said laugh, laugh at yourself, and what they have to say won’t matter anymore. My Mum and Dad were a perfect team when it came to me. I am a Gemini and I really take on the split personality aspect. I am split down the middle half like my mum half like my dad.

My Dad taught me how to get rid of bullies and be tough. He taught me how to laugh at myself, he taught me how to not take my Dyslexia so seriously and make it a part of who I am and turn it into a power not something that disables me. He pushed me towards sport and loved that I was an athlete, that I was strong and aggressive, he wanted me to own all these things that made me different and make them my power. He made people laugh, he had this mesmerizing presence, and I wanted to be like him. He didn’t care what anyone thought, he was strong, and protective, and the days he would drop me at school I would go in feeling like a warrior and he would give me this pep talk and say ‘don’t let the bastards get you down.’ My mum tells me, how my dad never liked to acknowledge my learning difference
and would avoid dealing with and couldn’t watch me be upset and struggle he liked to swoop in and be a hero at the end of the day.

Writing about my dad is hard, he passed away when I was 15 from lung cancer and heart disease. I was training in america when he was diagnosed, he told us at Christmas and passed away in the April. He told me he was invisible and that nothing could get him down, he made me touch the scar on his neck from his surgery and tell him how cool it was, he told me he was going to live forever and I believed him. He promised me we would go to a posh bar on my 18th birthday and discuss politics while we sipped on expensive whiskey. My dad found a treatment option in Spain, he moved there for his treatment and closed out all of us. He didn’t want us to see him in pain, or to suffer. My mum wasn’t allowed to know how long he had left, we didn’t know anything. All the movies you watch about cancer and how you get those last moments with them and that when they find out they have all this remorse and want to spend all the time they have left with you and you get that last talk with them, is a lie. No talk, no emotional one on one conversations, just denial until the very end. I am similar to my dad in that way, and I would do the exact same thing, push people away and suffer alone. I have been doing that since I was a child, my mum and dad had little knowledge of a lot of the things I went through. When it came to my coach, my mum had been horrified and scared by some of the things I have disclosed to her since writing my thesis, and my dad, well in some ways I am glad he didn’t live for me to be old enough to fully comprehend what happened with that coach because I think it would have killed him. My dad had his heart restarted twice, when I was younger, he had an irregular heartbeat, bought on by stress from work, he owned his own business. I am like my dad in ways that are positive and negative, I am extremely impulsive, as was he, I am loyal hard working and driven like he is… was.. sorry. I am loyal to the people that have a chance to get that close to me and I am different like he was. We had this bond, we were the two crazy ones in the family, I like to drive fast in
his car, and we would sing and the top of our lungs with the roof down, and when it rained
we would laugh and let the water drip though our hair. When I was angry and life, he didn’t
tell him to calm down he would bring old plates into the back garden and let me smash them,
he would tell me to scream and run down a hill. He was always trying to free me, to take me
away from what hurt me, I was his free spirited golden girl, and when I wasn’t winning first
place or the star of the show, or being his first mate on the boat, he worried about me. I think
he stayed away from me when I was sad because it just hurt him too much to deal with,
because it wasn’t something he could fix, he couldn’t make it go away, he couldn’t stop it
and that broke him. I understand, it was the same when he was diagnosed, I pushed away
because I couldn’t do the same, and we didn’t have anywhere to escape to anymore. He was
the only person that could look at me and make me feel like the most special girl in the world.
He was always proud of me, whatever it was, if it made me smile he was in. My favorite
memory with him is the boat. We were on holiday and he rented this boat for us to all go on
and I remember sitting on the front watching the sea and I just felt so overwhelming relaxed
and peaceful and I just fell asleep, I had found somewhere to be calm. A month later my dad
bought a boat. That was where we really connected, away from the business of life. My dad
and I both had such busy minds, such chaotic thoughts that we didn’t know how to express
and share, but when we were out at sea, none of those things mattered, we had found our
calm. Carpe demi – he called the boat.

Lost cloud (Poem, 3/2/2017)

I lie alone in silence, looking at the sky
The clouds are forming into new shapes and passing me by
I look for you up there, and I see a lone cloud, whispering in the wind,
It looks familiar, I am attacked by emptiness and gushes of hope,
surrounded by this endless sky, filled with lost souls, and I can’t find yours,
Can you see me, damaged and broken, wishing I could be a lost soul up there with you
If just for a day, I will fly high with you and we will wander and be lost together

My mum (Journal Entry, 2/12/2019)

My mum, is the sweetest most self-less person I know, but she is tougher than my dad. She was my rock and still is. She is nurturing, patient, empathetic and understanding. There was nothing I could do to make her love me any less. There are so many things that when I’m a mother I pray I can be like her. We would have one of our bad days. Where it started at breakfast and I wouldn’t eat anything, I hadn’t packed my bag, I screamed when she tried to do my hair up, I was shaking in anger, I made my older sister cry on the way to school. I was wrecking shop, anything I touched would break. She would get a call in the middle of the day from the nurse saying I didn’t feel well, possibly passed out from not eating. She wouldn’t come to get me anymore when the nurse called, I had done it to much. She would pick me up and I would be furious at her, how could she just leave me there. I wouldn’t talk to her, and then my dad would get home and I would only talk to him and want to watch football and not do my homework.

Again, as I write this, I start to well up overwhelmed with disappointment in myself. I feel so cruel. My mum dealt with me from the minute I woke up to the minute I went to sleep often disrupting her during the middle of the night as I couldn’t sleep and would cry and scream. My dad I would not see until 7 p.m. every night. She had done everything she could and then off I run to dad, who wasn’t there dealing with it all day. That must have felt awful for her. Then the next day, scared to come down stairs to face her, I would slowly come down to breakfast, already dressed, hair done myself and I would grab a banana, which is more than I would normally eat and I would go up to her and cry and say I’m sorry and she would just smile and say ‘today is a new day, what happened yesterday is behind us now’. And that
would be it, this was a reoccurring experience but every day, every time this happened, that what she would say to me.

**Sunflower (Poem, 2/15/2019)**

*I sway back and forth*

*The wind reaching at my bright yellow petals*

*Trying to shake me bare*

*To my dark black center*

*My fear settles*

*As I feel my roots tighten around me*

*Never breaking grip*

*I cannot be shaken for long*

*As you are there holding on*

*How delicate I am*

*Don’t let go, don’t let go*

I find it challenging as I write and reflect to reach deep inside and go back to being a child. I remember a few years ago my sister was watching home videos and I sat down, my eyes drifted towards the screen and there I was a little kid, giggling, hilarious, singing, falling over, making everyone laugh. That smile, so innocent, so unaware of what life was going to be, so full of hope. I started balling, I was so broken, it made me so sad to see myself that way, so happy and full of life, so pure and now I am broken. I am angry, a lost cause would be written all over my notebook with pages of black ink piercing the page from the silent panic attacks I would face in the class room. I left the room, I didn’t understand why it was so hard to watch. I still hate watching those videos to this day.

**Broken Fairytale (Poem, 2/4/2019)**

*My light burnt out as my innocence went up in fire*

*Give back to me the soul I lost as a child*

*Cover me with armor;*

*As I wasn’t made to be a princess*
When having to write about myself and my dyslexia, it’s hard to differentiate what is important, what is relevant, is a battle I play in my head. I feel it relevant to disclose a few things, one my tennis coach. He was in my life from when I was nine to 13, and continues to haunt me. He was my mum best friends significant other. He new more about me than I ever had a chance to control, and I walked a thin line of what I could tell my mum as it would get back to her friend and then back to him. If he was mean and I went home crying, she would tell her friend and I would come to practice the next day and be threatened and manipulated by him and tortured into running for two hours with 10 kilogram weights in my hands while he verbally abused me. After that he would tell me how he was doing it because he cared and that I needed him if I ever wanted to be anyone and without him I am nothing, that tennis is my only option because I am “a retard’. It felt like that word became my name. If I would have told my dad the things that went on there, I would have been out of there very fast. My dad made it clear that if that coach every laid a hand on me, he would take care of it. This coach had me feeling like I was less than nothing and, in the process, managed to isolate me from everyone around me. I have never seen or met anyone as evil as he was, I grew up way faster than any 11-year-old should and I knew more than any child should at that age.

He ripped me of my innocence, picked on me for what he liked to remind me every day was a disability, would break me down and make me feel smaller than the piece of clay I would stand over on the tennis court, would publicly humiliate me and ask me math questions and tell me to spell things, would set me up to make mistakes to make me feel more inferior than I already did. He was angry at me for being stupid and slow. I would get compared to the other girls and told I would never make it anywhere. He told me I was weak and that I
would end up depressed. I was eleven years old when he told me that. I was also eleven years old when we were away on a tennis tournament and he made me go on a walk with him, and threatened me, made me stand in the middle of the road and stop traffic. Why is the relevant, I don’t know. He made me hate myself, I didn’t have a voice. Everything I said was wrong, I was slow, I had a disability and I was angry and depressed, and he had complete control of me. It’s relevant because since I was diagnosed with Dyslexica, to this day I don’t feel like I’m in control, I feel like anyone who has a voice bigger and stronger than mine has taken mine from me. What I say is stupid, its wrong, it doesn’t matter, I will always be lesser than everyone else. I have battled demons from so young and that little innocent girl laughing and smiling in the garden didn’t stand a chance, her voice would be tainted and silenced unable to express herself and afraid of being wrong. Dyslexica affects your whole being, it is way more than having trouble in the classroom and not getting along with your teachers, it is who you are. It forms in everything I do, it’s the way I see the world, it is the way my brain works. It crippled me with depression, anxiety, trust issues, pain, suffering, social problems, self-esteem issues, public speaking anxiety, and it silenced me. Dyslexica is not just spelling and reading and mixing up numbers, it’s not just needed an extra hour on an exam or having a learning center, it’s a part of your being. It is confusing and lonely and scary. Until now I didn’t realize when I was diagnosed with dyslexia, I lost my worth, I didn’t feel worthy anymore and that made me vulnerable to all my situations.
Torment (Poem, 2/6/2019)

*My thoughts sicken me, why must these feelings cross my mind*
*Be implanted in my brain.*
*I am a disgusting human being, an object to man*
*I am not desired, just used*
*I was blind to evil until you showed me what It was*
*Now every man I see vile*
*Just Emptiness, a hollow shell, filled with raging aggression*
*Thoughts that will haunt my mind forever.*

Letter Christmas 2018 (Journal Entry, 12/22/2018)

I sit holding this letter (see Figure B4 in Appendix B) in my hand that my younger self had written. My mum has passed it to me, her eyes heavy and sad, my mind starts flashing back, oh I remember that look, I have seen it plenty of times, but not for a few years now. I open it and immediately gasp, the words ‘kill herself’ stabs me. The shock penetrating though me, I drop the letter and burst out in tears, remembering how bad it was, all I can spit out of my quivering lips is ‘nine years old’ ‘I was nine years old when I wrote this’.

“Final” Reflections (Journal Entry, 2/25/2019)

I troubles me to think about being dyslexic, as I sit here trying to reflect and connect the dots and piece together where it all went wrong or when it started to go right, I realize that there are no concrete answers. There is no huge revelation, like Dyslexia my life has been messy and sporadic. I often talk with my mum about my Dyslexia and tennis and my experiences. Whether it be with coaches, teachers, friends or therapists. I always feel a little on the outside, I seem to feel things harder than my friends, can’t connect with them on the levels they do with each other. I like my space, I find peace in not having to rely on anyone. I have always been better one on one. I relax, don’t feel judged. I can settle down and take my time. Being dyslexic, has its tribulations. It has been a hard path this far. Yet I have found
peace with so much in my past, that I held onto for so long, carrying this weight with me and this uncomfortable anger. As I wrote my auto ethnography, I was surprised how little I felt towards my all-girls school. The bullies I had their no longer matter to me, I proved them all wrong, I’m not stupid at all, and I have come much father in the educational system than quite a few of them and that is enough for me, and for the teachers that didn’t have the patience and wanted to make a example of me, well I feel sorry for them, I got here despite them and that makes it all the more rewarding for me. I might not ever be able to spell perfectly or excel at math, but that’s okay. There are more important things to me that spelling, it doesn’t define who I am or how smart I am. It’s okay if I forget something as soon as I read it, I’ll just read it over and over again, in my own time and when it clicks, I will move on. Nothing wrong with that. I will find a way to organize my work in a way that makes sense to me. It will get hard and sometimes impossible, and I will breathe and take my time and remind my self that there are more important things in life than this moment I am stuck in right now.

I have found it extremely concerning that since I started university in America, I have found no comfort in help center, no safe haven to go when I am overwhelmed or unprepared. I have yet to find a hand reaching out, offering council or tutoring. Helping me to prepare for the classes ahead, or to face tough days. What a shame. I am extremely fortunate to have a mum who will pick up the phone at all hours of the day for me, constantly trying to understand my difference and empathetically struggling though with me. Reminding me of my worth and abilities and taking my mind from a dark scary place into the light. It worries me to think about all those people like me, who don’t have that person and that safe place, because even when I have had those things, having my person has sometimes not been enough as my feelings have overtaken me and left me powerless over my thoughts. There needs to be better facilities for people with differences, a safe space to call their own that they
don’t have to share. Somewhere they don’t feel judged and can ask for help and know whoever they ask can assist and give answers. Someone who can relate and empathies and comfort, someone who can reassure and calm down, who can invite you into a safe space. Somewhere bright and positive that isn’t labeled as a disability center but something encouraging and hopeful. Where they follow up with you and check-in to make sure you are on track and explore options to better help and support the student as needed. There needs to be more than just an exchange of letters at the beginning of a semester, it needs to be constant program, there needs to be consistency, when something like college is an up and down ride of overwhelming pressures, and misunderstandings and constant learning experiences. There needs to be someone reaching out a hand when you feel like there is nothing left.

I like being Dyslexic, I love that I am different and that I see things differently than other people. I feel like I have a superpower. I catch things that other people miss. I process things in a special way. Being dyslexic gave me umph, spark, personality and taught me how to hustle, how to take what I’ve got and run with it. I wouldn’t change a thing about me, because I want to change how others see Dyslexia and I couldn’t do that if I didn’t have it.
Chapter Five: Findings

I struggled with organizing this chapter around several distinct “themes” that I found prominent when I used constant comparison to read and reread my journals and other self-reflexive writings in the previous chapter, realizing they overlapped too much and were very messy to organize into standalone categories as they seem to feed into each other. I was trying to follow the advice from my advisor about how to organize this chapter based on what she is used doing and seeing in more traditional social science papers and with qualitative data analysis, but it didn’t feel right so I came up with findings as they’re organized below instead. I didn’t want to compromise my writing trying to conform to something more traditional that I felt couldn’t explain my findings, which are under the more general headings: (1) Ethics of care, gender, and dyslexia; (2) Writing as voice; (3) Writing as therapy; and (4) New theoretical directions for communication.

Ethics of Care, Gender, and Dyslexia

It was interesting to see how I experienced both traditionally masculine and feminine values so fiercely. Which, when reviewing my personal narrative, made sense, as I wrote that I was split half like my dad and my mum. My mum exuded patience and empathy. She steadily took the time to understand and attend to my needs in the most caring and compassionate way possible, which is central to what ethics of care entails (Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan’s (1982) theory stresses how to respond to the needs of others in complicated real-life situations, focusing on things such as compassion, empathy, patience, reciprocity, and vulnerability. Gilligan focused on humans being interdependent, caring for one another and others caring for them. Ethics of care emphasizes our responses to other people in various concrete situations (rather than abstract masculine versions of ethics based on objectivity and justice) and our understanding of what is moral and ethical, so when I wrote in my personal narrative that my mum would forgive me every day and recite to me, “Today is a new day,
what happened yesterday is behind us” she was embracing ethics of care without even knowing it. It does not surprise me that I often wrote letters to my mum saying that she was my best friend, or expressing how much I loved her, as her embracing character calmed me and was incredibly important to how I have developed as a woman. I now possess those characteristics and am excited to be a mother like her.

Whereas on the other end of the spectrum, I am my dad. Intensely competitive, I thoroughly enjoyed sports and being able to release my aggression physically, and I felt my personality “fit” better in the company of boys rather than girls most of the time. I am very aware of my emotionality and am often called “sensitive,” but at the same time, I often prefer autonomy and competitive, hierarchical relationships and social settings that Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984, 1992) would describe as more masculine than the relationships focused on values of equality, interdependence, and mutuality more common among girls.

From my personal narrative I have taken comfort in seeing how I have embraced both my parents’ personalities whether it be stereotypically masculine or feminine values, but it is still quite a complex aspect of my personality to figure out. Having a mixture of both also explains why I excelled at a mixed-gender school rather than an all-girls school. I found an outlet competing against mostly boys in sports and theatre at Egerton after years at the all-girls school feeling isolated and suffering anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. When I was at Egerton, I could choose every day which Georgie I wanted to be, I wasn’t conformed into being “girly” or “boyish.” I could just be who I felt like being that day. I think my masculine values were more intense as I made the transition from PST to Egerton because for so long, I had felt lesser than my peers and odd or strange, but I was then thrust into an environment where we were all our own versions of odd or strange—or different, which Gilligan actually valued enough to put in the title of her famous book In a Different Voice,
but something I was only able to experience positively when at a school surrounded by mostly boys.

Because of my own past, I would have been interested to review research in which studies had been conducted in all-girls schools, but unfortunately, as I showed in the literature (also see Appendix A), the majority were all-boys schools. Considering the effects of the move on me from an all-girls school to a mixed school, which became even more apparent through this autoethnography, it would be very interesting, and I would argue very needed, to expand future research on dyslexia to include all-girls schools and other more heterogeneous samples and settings than what exists now. This might be an ideal place for health communication scholars to begin to fill the gap in communication research on dyslexia. For example, I wonder if being at an all-girls school hinders girls from embracing traditionally masculine values that can be extremely powerful when having a learning difference. I say this from feeling so small in the all-girl classroom to transforming into a completely different person in a more openly competitive environment. Sports saved me, gave me a sense of belonging. I think that’s because I felt equal to the boys—I was just as capable as them if not more so, I would beat them fair and square, and once I won it couldn’t be taken from me. I liked how simple that was—the rules and the game were run by what Gilligan (1982) described as masculine logics: objective, deductive, fair. But as much as I wanted it to be that “simple,” I was also an incredibly emotional and sensitive girl, and it was frustrating to be dangling in the middle of these masculine and feminine values. For as much as I wanted to embrace the masculine and be “just like the boys,” I was still a girl fighting in a classroom of 14 boys and just three girls.

Prior to my research I hadn’t given much thought to the fact that girls in my classes at Egerton were so outnumbered. As I started reviewing certain studies, it suddenly felt extremely problematic. As Arms et al. (2008) pointed out, girls are largely marginalized in
the classroom, overshadowed by the more assertive, disruptive behavior of boys. This is because boys are praised for taking risks and for their intellectual endeavors, whereas girls are applauded for being submissive to authority and being well behaved (Arms et al., 2008). Reflecting back on my experiences now, this explains a lot about my identity and why I felt so split two ways as a child. One minute I could be applauded for my courageous, competitive spirit, but the next minute I was supposed to be quiet and speak when spoken to. This double standard seems very detrimental and explains why girls in particular suffer from self-esteem issues and also depression when they have dyslexia (Alexander-Passe, 2006). Girls are socialized and encouraged to abide by this preconceived idea of being ladylike, submit to authority, to please, and in turn their needs rarely get met (Arms et al., 2008). I have realized from my experiences and reflection that when I took on more masculine traits, I was trying to break the mold girls are put in and pressured to stay in. The more research and reflecting I’ve done, the more I realize it’s highly unlikely I would have be able to come out on the other side of my childhood experiences with dyslexia and school and everything else it touched without suffering some kinds of depression and self-esteem issues.

Along the same lines, not only are girls with dyslexia marginalized in the classroom, but also in research. The more I explored and learned about my thesis topic, I felt as though I mattered even less. The statement, boys have dyslexia 2-3 times more often than girls (Arms et al., 2008)) haunts me. I felt like the statistic is used as a copout for researchers to not have to include girls in their studies on dyslexia. Which brings me back to Gilligan (1982), as her work on ethics of care theory was started in response to Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1984) work on the stages of moral development from which he excluded girls and only used boys as participants, and then generalized his findings to make conclusions about girls as well as boys. Kohlberg’s theory on moral development privileged masculine values like objectivity, reason, and especially justice as the highest moral attainment. He concluded that girls and
women were less developed morally than boys and men were based on his masculine version of morality associated with justice (Carse, 1996).

On the other hand, Gilligan (1982) found that such abstract principles were not highly regarded among women and girls, who tended to privilege and practice more relational and emotional values like interdependence, empathy, mutuality, compassion, and vulnerability. Gilligan argued that girls are socialized to make decisions differently than boys and in ways that enable girls to maintain relationships and sustain connections based on those traditionally feminine values. I think the keyword for me there is *different*. Girls are different, and girls with dyslexia are even more different on top of that, so they should not be put in the same category or understood by the same measures as boys. For girls have a more complicated, or at least different, grasp on the relationship between self and other.

When I was researching ethics of care and gendered and feminist values an ethics, I enjoyed reading Nel Noddings’ (1992) work on using ethics of care in education. She argues that care should be at the heart of the education system, which aligned with some of the research I had found exploring children with dyslexia. Teachers’ behavior towards children with dyslexia was particularly prevalent. Gwernan-Jones and Burden (2010) pointed out that the lack of learning support as dyslexic children grow up highly impacts their self-esteem and learning ability. Similarly, Goldstein (2009) explained that how teachers care and act towards children with dyslexia doesn’t only impact their school experiences but follows them into their personal lives, which aligns with Noddings’ vision of care to be the foundation of curriculum decision making. According to Owens and Ennis (2005), Noddings suggested that teachers approach student needs from the subjective perspective of “I must do something” instead of the more objective “something must be done” approach. Teachers are motivated by this philosophy to perform conscious acts of “being with” and “doing for” the sake of their students. (p. 393)
I find Noddings’ theory incredibly encouraging and am hopeful that the educations system can draw on her theory and incorporate it into the teaching curriculum for future educators, as I believe caring is where it should start, especially with a child who has dyslexia.

Nodding (1992) defined caring as a set of relational practices that foster shared recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and possibility. I have experienced this in action as I wrote my thesis, having an advisor who was so caring and exuded patience and understanding with my work, and dealing with my inconsistent personality, meaning believing in myself one day and panicking the next. I always felt comforted in the fact that I truly believe she cares, and I find that so precious because it helped me feel calm and controlled. Knowing she would take her time and listen and understand as much as she could made me want to work hard and impress her. I enjoyed sending her my work because even though there might have been a lot of feedback, it was positive or constructive; she would look past the spelling and grammar and we would come back to it later, and from her doing that it allowed me to grow in confidence as I wrote.

Writing, Voice, and Dyslexia

As I started my personal narrative I was concerned that I would have nothing to say. That I would have all these ideas of thoughts in my brain but be unable to transfer them to paper, to process them well enough to write them in constructive sentences. Worse still, that it would make sense in my head but not to others, and how would I make it make sense to them? I feared writing words so personal and raw and getting feedback over spelling and grammar. I was worried that I had felt so much silence and lack of voice my whole life, that what I had to say was unimportant. I almost felt as if the words didn’t deserve to make it to paper. But that was not the case, as I started writing my personal narrative it was not what I expected at all. I learned so much about myself and what makes me who I am and how being a girl with dyslexia had made my identity more complicated. “Autoethnography creates a
space for a person to use writing or performance to navigate pain, work through confusion, express anger, and come to terms with uncertainty” (Adams, 2012, p.184). Autoethnography uses processes like writing as therapeutic processes that can help a person better understand, reframe, or work through an experience (Adams, 2012). I travelled back to memories I had put in a box in my head never to be opened for fear of having those memories exposed. I feel different now, I feel self-assured, I started to trust what I was writing the more I wrote, I started to see the direction my writing was taking me and was excited that I wouldn’t have to conform to the usual template others take, and I had the ability to write in the way that made sense to me. I found it wildly exhilarating to be in control of the creation of my writing. It was completely up to me, the direction I chose to take it, and although that was scary in the beginning and slightly nerve-racking, it was positive, it helped me reach inside and find my voice and to write with no structure and boundaries, to be free to put my words on a page without fear of messing up spelling or grammar because it is ME that is how I write and if people could look past the mistakes and into the words constructed on the page they just might see the greatness behind it all, when those of us who have been without a voice since they were discovered with dyslexia are given the opportunity to tell their story in their own way, it frees us from all those misunderstandings and silenced moments. Autoethnography allows me to have a voice in my research and be heard (Adams, 2012). I am free of the negative people from my past, the teachers, coaches, and bullies who put me down and shook the life out of me and took my voice. I have taken it back through writing, and found what I lost. When I can explain and write my way I am capable of more than I could have ever imagined.

I think writing can be a powerful therapeutic activity; I guess I have known that for a while now but never connected the dots. A few years ago, I took an undergraduate health communication class. At the time I was in serious denial about the passing of my dad. When I
took this class, we were encouraged to keep a journal and write about anything, wherever, whatever we felt, thought, anything. For some reason my dad kept popping into my head, probably because a lot of the reading we covered in class were around disease and cancer and people’s experience with it. At first, I found this class uncomfortable and I almost dropped it. When I told me professor it was too painful to read the book she had assigned about a women who had cancer, she empathetically told me I didn’t have to read the book and encouraged me to write about my dad and produce some poetry. I was horrified at that thought; I had never written a poem before let alone about my dad. A few weeks later I had written eight. I shared them with my mum and my sisters, and they have since been published in a grief magazine. I often read them back to myself when I feel sad and miss my dad, and my sisters and mum ask me to resend them when they feel down. I didn’t know I had the capabilities to turn something so sad into something beautiful. I didn’t feel much anxiety when I wrote poems, as they weren’t graded and analyzed. I was simple working though something tragic and it didn’t feel like school work. It was at my own pace and I simply wrote when it came to me.

It doesn’t seem to make sense, but not a lot about being dyslexic does: Writing is therapeutic. Something that used to give me such anxiety has become something productive that I can enjoy. Jones (2007) believed that traditional forms of narrative research were inadequate for helping people with disabilities find their voice and in order to add a voice of disability to the discourse, alternative forms of narrative inquiry such as supportive autoethnography need to be explored. The feelings of anxiety, shame, fear, frustration, anger, and being silenced slowly dissipated the more I wrote. I would suddenly find myself just picking up my laptop and writing, whereas before I started my thesis when I would have to write something for school it would have been a two-hour ordeal before I finally built up the courage to sit and write. Now writing isn’t as scary. I have belief in my abilities, and I see
them take form on the page that I constructed in a way that makes sense. I enjoyed watching my random sporadic thoughts form from the chaos in my head to complete sentences on paper. As I was embracing my difference and accepting who I was as a writer, I stopped comparing my words to others and allowed my words to be heard and stand alone.

I believe similar practices of therapeutic writing, such as journaling and poetry, could also be therapeutic for others with dyslexia who might otherwise dread writing. Writing as therapy could encourage other girls with dyslexia in particular to write and find their voices, possibly explain their frustrations and how they feel and live with and make meaning of this learning difference. It has the ability to empty your mind of the worst thoughts, as for some reason the thoughts don’t seem as scary when they are written on the page. Starting therapeutic writing programs as early as grade school, and encouraging it both in and outside of the classroom, could be a creative approach for helping girls or anyone with dyslexia to heal and grow academically, psychologically, socially, and emotionally. I believe that if health communication scholars and practitioners began to fill the silence in communication research around topics like this, they might be able to make further practical suggestions for strategies to help girls with dyslexia who are still being marginalized and silenced in research and everyday life.

New Theoretical Directions

As I did express a mixture of masculine and feminine values and experience them differently when I was younger in school than what Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984, 1992) theorized through ethics of care, such as thriving at being in a competitive environment with both boy and girl friends in my second school, I believe it is necessary to consider other theoretical lenses—feminist or not—useful for understanding dyslexia, especially in girls, from a health communication approach. There are many theoretical lenses that might be worth using in health communication research to explore dyslexia and gender, especially
considering no such research agendas exist yet in health communication, but one specifically
stands out to me now at this stage of my thesis: discourse of deficiencies, which I will explain
further below. But first, I’ll discuss how two theories more familiar in communication
scholarship could also be applied to future communication research on dyslexia and gender:
feminist standpoint theory and muted group theory.

**Feminist standpoint theory.** Feminist standpoint theory was first theorized by
feminist Nancy Hartstock (1983) and applies when a person recognizes and engages cultural
values and power relations that contribute to subordination or oppression of certain groups,
such as women (Wood, 2009). The specific motivations of feminist standpoint theory are “(a)
identifying cultural values and power dynamics that account for the subordination of girls and
women and (b) highlighting the distinct knowledge cultivated by activities that are typically
assigned to females” (Wood, 2009, p. 397). According to feminist standpoint theory,
women’s lives generally differ from men’s, as men and women are given different
opportunities and roles, and women are traditionally expected to take primary responsibility
for the home and parenting as well as complying to please others (Wood, 2009). According to
Hartstock (1983), women’s unpaid work in the private sphere of the home and knowledge
about the world from their standpoint is not as valued as men’s work and experiences outside
the home in the public sphere.

This theory also highlights the fact that the conditions and experiences common to
girls and women are not natural but result from social and political forces (Wood, 2009).
Therefore, although girls’ and women’s situations and activities may shape their perspectives,
they don’t automatically convert to a feminist standpoint for all women (Woods, 2009).
According to Hartstock (1983), it takes work to achieve a feminist standpoint because it
involves knowing about both women’s and men’s standpoints in society. To develop a
feminist standpoint, people have to engage in an intellectual struggle to recognize, examine,
and challenge broad power relations that account for the lesser status of girls and women and the activities they are expected to pursue (Hartstock, 1983; Wood, 2009).

Feminist standpoint theory also holds that the different social locations that women and men occupy cultivate distinct kinds of knowledge. Multiple feminist standpoint theorists believe that “knowledge from subordinated social locations are more complete than knowledge from dominate social locations” (Wood, 2009, p. 397). They found that the marginalized groups are likely to understand both their own groups perspective and the perceptive of the people from the more dominant group but in tern the more dominant members are not as likely to understand or even have a motivation to understand the perspective of the marginalized group. So, it would seem that the dominant group hold less knowledge of the social world in compression to the marginalized group (Wood, 2009).

I have developed a superior knowledge that comes from having the standpoint of a girl/women with dyslexia. Being a girl with dyslexia not only do I have knowledge about how to survive in a world where the people in power are traditionally men mostly without dyslexia or other differences and even professors and teachers in higher education being male. I have to have the knowledge gained from the standpoint of being a girl/woman and having dyslexia has allowed me to survive and even thrive in school, work, social settings and family relations. I have this distinct standpoint that allows me to have more knowledge that the men I am surrounded by, which I have found helps me to understand them even more, I feel better knowing I have all this knowledge developed from my distinct standpoint from being part of a marginalized group that allowed me to be better that a lot of those men and from here on out they won’t have the ability to make me feel lesser or stupid. As feminist standpoint theory argues that men couldn’t possibly understand the standpoint of a women as he hasn’t walked in her shoes. So, anyone who is not a women with dyslexia can never truly understand my standpoint and share my knowledge or view of the world and know how it
feels to be me. Which is why I think autoethnography is such a necessary method to give insight into something majority of people can never ever truly understand.

**Muted group theory.** Muted group theory was originally developed by Edwin Ardener and Shirly Ardener and put emphasis on the way communication practices of dominant groups suppress, mute, or devalue the words, ideas, and discourse of marginalized groups (Kramarae, 2009). This theory focuses on “what and how much people with differing social status speak, when and where they speak…and what repercussions” (Kramarae, 2009, p. 668). Muted group theory centers on the way language systems are not created equally for all speakers and provides a valuable framework for looking at the power relationships, and especially the communication, between unequal groups (Kramarae, 2009). People who become attached or assigned to a marginalized group could have a lot to say, but in mixed situations they have little power to speak freely without getting into trouble, as the words of people from marginalized groups are often dismissed or devalued and their knowledge not considered sufficient, valuable, or valid (Kramarae, 2009).

Often, experiences of people from marginalized groups are taken and reinterpreted for them by other people; this happens as they are encouraged to see themselves as represented by the words and notions of the more dominant group (Kramarae, 2009). This process causes those in the subordinated groups to sometimes “experience a doubleness of existence, seeing reality both as it is experienced from the dominant perspective and also from their own, muted, perspective” (Kramarae, 2009, p. 668). We see this a lot when women are not as free and able as men are to say what they want without having to fear ridicule and punishment, so women are muted. Women and those from marginalized groups often have no choice other than to learn the perceptions, language, and knowledge of the dominant (mostly male) group, and women cannot as easily or directly articulate their experiences because the words and
The muting of women and other marginalized groups is unfortunately an everyday enduring silent crisis. Kramarae (2009) speaks to the fact that by not including girls and women in theorizing and research, many communication researchers have further devalued the voices of women and marginalized groups. I definitely felt that as I conducted my research and found little to no studies about dyslexia that included girl or female participants, and results from research relying on boys with dyslexia and male experiences of dyslexia were often generalized to girls and female populations with little to no acknowledgment of difference between the groups. I believe that muted group theory would be a really interesting approach in communication scholarship to expose and challenge how girls with learning differences are constantly being silenced (literally and metaphorically) and put in a box, much like I talked often about being silenced by my peers and superiors, as well as not having a voice at all.

**Discourse of deficiencies.** Finally, I propose a critical approach in disability studies called discourse of deficiencies (Dudley-Marlin & Paugh, 2010) as a fascinating and useful theoretical lens to use in future communication research on dyslexia, including studies focused on girls with dyslexia, as it does not have such a narrow understanding of gendered values like Gilligan’s (1982) ethics of care. As girls struggle to find their own identities, I think it is significant that they have the possibility to embrace masculine values such as competition and autonomy in school and social relationships like I did, as their needs are different than the needs of regular girls. I found that I often used/use phrases such as “I was never enough”, “I couldn’t do enough” as well as constant feelings of being “lesser than”, and overwhelming frustration with being undervalued and overlooked. That language is what
made me think of discourse of deficiencies, as those flawed words that I used and that all too often still come up when I write or talk about myself mean, essentially, being deficient.

Dudley-Marlin and Paugh (2010) described the “official story of learning disabilities” as a “narrative of progress focused on the needs of individual students.” They explained that the category of learning disabilities has served both the institutional needs of schools (by helping to preserve the fundamental assumption that school success and failure are a function of merit) and the needs of middle-class parents of low-achieving children (differentiating their children from other, largely poor and minority, children who struggle in school). (Dudley-Marlin & Paugh, 2010)

They continued to explain: “Through a deficit lens, the essential response to learning failures is: What’s wrong with this student? This gaze typically leads to a series of instructional moves aimed at ‘fixing’ students through best methods” (Dudley-Marlin & Paugh, 2010).

Dudley-Marlin and Paugh (2010), along with other critical disability scholars, posed a different formula than the harmful discourse of deficiencies that feeds the leading myth of schooling and holds that individual “effort and ability are the sole determinates of educational success and failure.” taking the blame for student “failure” off of the schools, teachers, and parents (or at least the While middle-class parents). The goal of their study was to encourage teachers to shift their gaze from what students who struggle academically cannot do to what makes them smart. Dudley-Martin and Paugh (2010) expressed that deficit thinking leads to narrow skill-based curricula that limit the educational possibilities for students, including special education. They instead proposed a “social constructivist framework [that] situates learning and learning failure, not in the heads of individual students, but in the context of social relations” (Dudley-Marlin & Paugh, 2010).

Therefor rather than being or having the problem, each individual person (student, teacher, parent, etc.) “has a relationship with the problem” (Dudley-Marlin & Paugh, 2010). So, when faced with a child with learning differences the questions become aligned with: “What’s going on here? What teacher moves or conditions of learning make this student
(in)competent?” (Dudley-Marlin & Paugh, 2010). By asking these questions, we are enabling teachers to shift their focus from the deficit discourse of learning disabilities that weakens children’s chances in life and “their humanity,” which makes asking these questions a “moral imperative” according to Dudley-Marlin and Paugh (2010).

This more critical way of thinking about learning disabilities is intensely important, as I felt that when I was a child having dyslexia was a problem, I was labeled a problem child. The environment or the way I was taught never came into question, only my lack of abilities did, which in turn hindered my learning and capabilities and affected me emotionally, socially, and psychologically, not to mention academically. Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2010) came to the conclusion that not only do teachers need to be worked with to create a language that builds children as smart, but better yet, educators must also embrace the task to explore the way they are talking to others and the moral implications of the way they do so.

I found Dudley-Marlin and Paugh’s (2010) study strongly backs up my experience of being a child with dyslexia and how I mention the label. As well as the misconceptions I experienced as a child with dyslexia, the discourse of deficiencies I experienced in school penetrated the way I learned after I was a child and having stayed with me through my college education, and I think that was clear in my personal narrative. A lot of people tell me I am too hard on myself, and it is now clear where that stems from and why I have a need to please, as I feel whatever it is I do couldn’t possibly be enough. I can see how, if teachers step back and ask something as simple as “what is going on here?”, that way of thinking could have a positive effect on a dyslexic child as they are not taking on their difference alone.

Furthermore, I believe it also starts with changing the deficient or deficit way dyslexia is put forward, specifically calling dyslexia a “disability” and calling us “diagnosed.” From day one we are put in a “lesser-than” category, and it becomes an uphill battle from there.
My hope is that someday soon health communication scholars will be inspired by feminist theory, critical disability studies, and other interdisciplinary approaches to understanding girls’ experiences with dyslexia and other issues around disability and gender in general to begin filling those gaps in communication theory and practice.
# Appendix A

## Gender and Age Characteristics of Sampling Reported in Education and Psychology

### Research on Dyslexia

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Author(s), Date, and Journal Name</th>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Sample Characteristics and Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anderson (2009) <em>Support for learning</em></td>
<td>‘They're telling me what I already know instead of what I don't know’: Dyslexic pupils' experiences of withdrawal tuition during the later primary years</td>
<td>Four 10-11-year-olds, Genders unclear</td>
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<td>Burden &amp; Burdett (2005) <em>British Journal of Special Education</em></td>
<td>Factors associated with successful learning in pupils with dyslexia: A motivational analysis</td>
<td>50 boys, 11-16 years old (Takes place in an all-boys school for special education)</td>
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<td>Burden &amp; Burdett (2007) <em>British Journal of Special Education</em></td>
<td>What’s in a name? Students with dyslexia: Their use of metaphor in making sense of their disability</td>
<td>50 boys, Special school for boys with dyslexia</td>
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<td>Dåderman, Nilvang, &amp; Levander (2014) <em>Applied Psychological Research Journal</em></td>
<td>“I dislike my body, I am unhappy, but my parents are not disappointed in me”: Self-esteem in young women with dyslexia</td>
<td>12 teens and women, 16-30 years old</td>
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<td>Glazzard (2010) <em>Support for Learning</em></td>
<td>The impact of dyslexia on pupils' self-esteem</td>
<td>9 pupils, 14-15 years old, Gender not stated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glazzard &amp; Dale</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>‘It takes me half a bottle of whiskey to get through one of your assignments’: Exploring one teacher educator’s personal experiences with dyslexia</td>
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<td>Gwernan-Jones &amp; Burden</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Are they just lazy? Student teachers’ attitudes about dyslexia</td>
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<td>Hornstra, Denessen, Bakker, van den Bergh, &amp; Voetea</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Teacher attitudes toward dyslexia: Effects on teacher expectations and the academic achievement of students with dyslexia</td>
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<td>Humphrey</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Teacher and pupil ratings of self-esteem in developmental dyslexia</td>
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<td>Humphrey</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Facilitating a positive sense of self in pupils with dyslexia: The role of teachers and peers</td>
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<td>Ingeson</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Growing up with dyslexia: Interviews with teenagers and young adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kirwan &amp; Leather</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Students’ voices: A report of the student view of dyslexia study skills tuition</td>
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<td>Klein</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>To the student whom it may concern</td>
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Appendix A (Continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nalavany, Carawan, &amp; Brown (2011)</td>
<td>Considering the role of traditional and specialist schools: Do school experiences impact the emotional well-being and self-esteem of adults with dyslexia?</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Could be self-reported dyslexics (whatever that means) 95 attended special school 129 normal school</td>
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<td>Washburn, Joshi, &amp; Binks-Cantrell (2011)</td>
<td>Teacher knowledge of basic language concepts and dyslexia</td>
<td>185 teachers of kindergarten through 5th grade</td>
<td>185 teachers of kindergarten through 5th grade</td>
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*British Journal of Special Education*
Appendix B

Handwritten Letters and Notes from Childhood (2003-2007)

Figure B1. “No. 1 Mum Award”: Letter to mother (2003). I wrote this to my mum when I was eight years old and struggling with bullying at the all-girls school I attended at the time.

Top
family

no.1 mum award goes to

Diana Gosen

I vote for my mum because she is sweet, kind, generous, thoughtful, clever, butiful and she is always there for me and when I have now one to play with she would play with me and when I was lonely she is always there to cheer me up. Most of all I love her here because she’s my mum.

by Georgina Gosen
Appendix B (Continued)

Figure B2. “Nobody Wants to Play with Me”: Handwritten note (Jan. 2004). I wrote this when I was eight years old and struggling with bullying at school.
Appendix B (Continued)

Figure B3. “I Just want to go to Another School”: Letter to mother (Feb. 2004). I wrote this letter to my mum at eight years old. After this letter, we started looking at other school options, and I was taken out of school at Easter (two months later) because I became so unhappy.
Figure B4. “Georgie wants to kill her self”: Handwritten note (Feb. 2004). Written when I was eight years old and becoming increasingly unhappy at school.
Appendix B (Continued)

Figure B5. “I am Stupid”: Handwritten note (Feb. 2004). I wrote this when I was eight years old and becoming intensely unhappy at school.
Figure B6. “Not These Happy Days”: Homeschool assignment (Sept. 2006). Essay about being bullied at my previous school that I wrote with my English tutor when I began homeschooling.
Appendix C

Letters From my Family

Figure C1. Letter from father (June 2006). Written by my dad before I left for a tennis trip to France.

Georgie,

You are a beautiful, intelligent, and kind girl. Never forget that. If people are not nice to you it is only because they are not as good as you. Love you,

Daddy xxx
Appendix C (Continued)

Figure C2. Letter from sister (March 2007). Letter my older sister wrote about me to my mum when I was struggling with fitting in at my tennis club.

Dear Mummy

Don't be sad & it makes me sad. Cheer up!!! It will get better I promise. I got through it so will Georgie.

You are a Godsend! I don't know what I would do without you.

P. S.
References

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VITA
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learning differences as well as continue to work on dyslexia research.