Girls Talk Back: Changing School Culture through Feminist and Service-Learning Pedagogies

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This paper explores the intersection of feminism and service-learning by describing the creation of a women's studies course for girls attending an alternative high school. In the course participants could critique sexist practices in the media and in the school, as well as establish cultural competence through engaging in service projects that they would lead. The researchers found that course content correlated with students' identity development regarding sexual harassment awareness and prevention. Furthermore, participants' increased their internal motivation (locus of control) in general and self-identification with feminism.

Keywords: women's studies, feminism, nontraditional education, secondary education, experiential learning

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Few will dispute that learning cannot take place devoid of community (Varlotta, 1996, p. 22).

Pairing feminism and service-learning can produce powerful pedagogies. This paper explores the intersection of feminism and service-learning by describing the creation of a women's studies course for girls attending an alternative high school. Through the course they could critique sexist practices in the media and in the school, as well as establish cultural competence by engaging in service projects that they would lead. The course was created for students who had previously felt powerless to combat the sexism they faced in their lives. More specifically, there was a high degree of sexual harassment occurring in this school. Prior to the creation of the course, the female students expressed to the first author not only their hopelessness in combating it, but also the sense that such phenomena were normative and simply what women have to face in the world. In order to provide these students with a sense of control in their lives, the conditions to engage in student-led and directed service-learning projects were established. This paper studies the effectiveness of this proposition. The researchers found that course content correlated with a progression for students along a continuum of identity development regarding sexual harassment awareness and prevention.

Prior to the course, the participants in this study were more apt to accept traditionally negative terms used to refer to women such as "bitch" than they were to embrace a

term such as "feminist." This phenomenon was part of what inspired the first author to create the course, as feminism had been transformational for her as a high school student after she had the opportunity to take a women's studies class. Most high school girls in general express one of the following three sentiments: they have little understanding of feminism, they feel feminism is a negative term and disassociate with it, or they feel that feminism is no longer necessary (Martin, 2015). In this study, we found that participants exhibited both generalities regarding language usage and ambivalence to feminism prior to their enrollment in the course.

Research Background

Service-Learning

Opportunities for social engagement can influence girls to talk back to oppressive forces (Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart & Malley, 2006; Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz, 2006; DeMuth, 2011). Engaging in a resistant voice, which involves questioning harmful societal or school practices, can facilitate gains in agency, belonging, and competence (Harris, Melaas, & Rodacker, 1999; Leblanc, 2001; Mitra, 2004; Winans-Solis, 2014). Service-learning can provide such opportunities by bridging curricular objectives with community involvement and potentially inspiring students through engagement in social problems (Ginwright, Noguera & Cammarota, 2006).

Service-learning is a pedagogical technique through which students can learn to develop academic and social skills by actively participating in self- or class-generated projects for the betterment of the school and/or community (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Harris et al., 1999; Winans-Solis, 2014). These service experiences meet actual community needs as articulated by the community itself, are coordinated and supported by the school and community, are integrated with academic curricula, and provide students with opportunities to apply academic and social skills to situations outside of school (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Harris et al., 1999). According to Howard (2001), service-learning experiences must meet the following three criteria: (a) involve purposeful civic learning, (b) enhance academic learning, and (c) promote relevant and meaningful service within the community. Service-learning extends learning beyond the classroom, thereby enhancing curricular objectives, helps to facilitate a sense of personal and civic responsibility, and promotes a sense of caring for others (Kackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014).

The benefits students receive from participating in service-learning projects include improved academic performance, attendance, and self-motivation (Martin, 2006). A positive relationship exists between students who participate in service-learning projects and personal growth and social development (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Harris et al., 1999; Kraft & Billig, 1997). This growth can include the reduction of stereotypes, deeper cultural sensitivity, and increased student understanding of sociopolitical institutions (Eyler et al., 2001; Winans-Solis, 2014; Zimmerman, Krafchick, & Aberle, 2009). Service-learning can have a lasting positive impact on students; they may feel more personally and socially empowered and more connected to school in addition to the academic benefits that result. Service-learning can also be impactful for students labeled at-risk, not only in terms of academic improvement, but also in terms of identity development (Nelson & Sneller, 2011).

Feminism paired with service-learning can be beneficial to girls because service-learning has the potential to reinforce and intensify feminist course goals (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kackar-Cam, & Schmidt, 2014; Kelly, 2015), which is beneficial to students (Harris et al., 1999). These benefits include increased knowledge production/communication and improved relationships within schools and communities that transcend the barriers of sex, class, race, and sexual orientation through the examination of historical

and current inequalities and the efforts to overcome them (Varlotta, 1996; Winans-Solis, 2014). The combination of service-learning pedagogy with feminism as a form of social activism can be powerful in inspiring students to examine the society in which they live. It is only through clear examination and reflection that they can then determine what societal changes are necessary to promote social justice and a more equitable world (Lewis-Charp, Yu, & Soukamneuth, 2006; Winans-Solis, 2014). Such critical reflection on society and one's place within it is powerful, for it encourages students to look beyond themselves and to see themselves as members of their community (Deeley, 2010).

When students feel that they can make a difference in their own lives, they can experience a reduction in feelings of alienation (Billig, 2000; Winans-Solis, 2014). Once students accept the notion that they can make a difference in their own lives, a teacher can then promote the idea that students can make a difference in transforming their schools, communities, and world (Butin, 2006; Winans-Solis, 2014). Through ongoing personal reflection, students first transform themselves and then, in turn, work to transform the world around them, whether it be their school or community, or they may adopt a more global approach to social service or social change. As Kraft and Billig (1997) stated, "a service-learning philosophy enables a more natural way for children to see connections between curriculum and their lives, as their communities and life realities often become the basis for solving what they perceive as relevant problems" (p. 8).

For some, service-learning is a foray into social activism; when paired with feminist pedagogy, service-learning can lead not only to feminist identification but also to sustained community engagement. This study examined the impact of a women's studies course on high school-aged girls labeled "at-risk" and provides empirical support for how feminism paired with service-learning can impact sexual harassment awareness and prevention.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this analysis is a Feminist Critical Theory (Ackerly, 2000) and intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1991), which illustrates the intersectional foci of race, class, gender, and sexuality (among other factors) and how these various identity markers impact the lives of women and girls. The Feminist Critical Theory lens takes into account both historical oppressions and their implications as well as current struggles faced by historically oppressed populations. Analyses and critique of the social structures that work to maintain dominance and the status quo are key to this perspective because such forces also maintain voicelessness and marginalization. Feminist Critical Theory seeks to critique, problematize, and find solutions to counteract these negative social forces that serve to oppress many.

Feminist Critical Theory embraces and encourages a multiplicity of women's voices, both to dispel the idea that all women and girls speak collectively and to bring to the fore that there are in fact unique problems that impact women and girls because of their sex. Such a perspective brings to light oppressive social forces that impact women and girls because they are female.

Girls' Studies

Girls' Studies developed as an area of scholarship in the 1990s as a response to the marginalization of girls (teens and tweens) in youth research and the paucity of girl-centered feminist scholarship (e.g., research centering on girls, girlhood, and girls' culture) (Celeste Kearney, 2009). Literature in the field of Girls' Studies suggests that girls are still socialized to expect physical objectification; media images abound

where girls and women who embrace objectification are rewarded (Harris, 2004a; Lamb & Brown, 2006; McKay, 2013). Girls are also socialized to suppress their self-protective resistance; they learn to self-censor because society and its corresponding media do not value their voices (Lamb & Brown, 2006; Orenstein, 2011). Girls labeled at-risk for school failure may have even more challenges in the quest for self-acceptance; in fact, they may develop outsider status because of their at-risk label, which can further alienate them from school and from learning in general (Jones, Bench, Warnaar, & Stroup, 2013; Leblanc, 2001). Harris (2004b) argued that since the early 1990s, girls have been caught in a dichotomy between societal stereotypes of confidence and empowerment (e.g. "girl power") and societal fears of girls' low self-esteem and engagement in behaviors that put them "at risk" such as sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, and violence. Harris (2004b) articulated this dichotomy in her analysis of the "can do" girl versus the "at-risk" girl: "the at-risk category is a problematic one, for although it is usually intended as a framework for helping young people in difficult circumstances, it tends to dramatize and individualize their problems" (p. 25). The problems of girls labeled "at-risk" often come from societal issues endemic to their communities, but are also often blamed on their communities, whereas the "can-do" girls tend to be girls from privileged backgrounds mystified via the myth of meritocracy to believe that they had individually earned their own success. In sum, as Harris (2004b) argued,

> the at-risk category operates in a particular way in relation to young women, for they are imagined as both the passive victims of circumstances beyond their control, and also as willful risk takers who use girl power to their own (self-) destructive ends. (p. 26)

"Girl power," is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2001) as:

> Power exercised girls; spec. a self-reliant attitude among girls and young women manifested in ambition, assertiveness, and individualism. Although also used more widely (esp. as a slogan), the term has been particularly and repeatedly associated with popular music. . . .

Given this connection to popular music and thus commercialism (Harris, 2004a) the phenomenon of "girl power" is problematic. It places girls in a position to constantly monitor themselves in terms of body and beauty images. Furthermore, the concept provides girls the ideals to aspire to "mainstream success" (Harris, 2004a, p. 29), and those girls who deviate from the proscribed path are viewed as delinquent risk takers. Feminism, in contrast, involves more than simply empowerment on an individual basis, but collective and systemic advocacy of women's rights in terms of political, social, and economic equality, and involves the end to all forms of oppression (hooks, 2000). Research suggests that feminism can be a beneficial philosophical standpoint for girls: it can increase agency, competence, and internal motivation (Harris, Melaas, & Rodacker 1999; Jones, et al., 2013; Martin, 2009; Martin & Sullivan, 2010; McRobbie, 1991).

Methods[1]

Feminist methodology in general can involve combining methodological approaches and enables the researcher to capture a more complete picture of the area of study (Epstein, Jayaratne, & Stewart, 2008). That being said, our methodological approach to data analysis utilized a layered style, combining feminist discourse analysis with

[1] This article is authored by two researchers who analyzed the data from the lead author's classroom. For this reason, some of the article is presented in first-person narration from the first author's perspective.

a more traditional thematic analysis of data. The methodological approach utilized in this analysis is a combination of feminist research practices (inspired by Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007) and action research (Sagor, 1999). Both approaches possess an inherent activist component and offer a variety of evaluative, investigative, and analytical research methods designed to diagnose problems or weaknesses and the opportunity for continued reflection. Sagor (1999) suggests a triad of data sources in order to maintain reliability, a model utilized in this study. (See Table 1: Data Collection Matrix.) In this study, we used a variety of data sources including participant interviews, analysis of class artifacts (e.g., participant papers, projects, and reflection journals), and the first author's research journal (i.e., a notebook containing field notes; reflections upon course interactions; and key events, such as pedagogical challenges and triumphs). More specifically, Sagor's (1999) model of action research informs this research. According to Sagor (1999), "action research. . . is conducted by people who want to do something to improve *their* own situation" (p. 7). Action researchers adopt a program of study because they want to know whether they can solve a problem, or do something in a better way (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). The first author endeavored to reduce the problem of sexual harassment in the alternative high school where she taught English by creating a feminist approach to service-learning, where her female students could share their experiences and put their learning into practice in the school and in the community.

Table 1: *Data Collection Matrix*

	Overall Theme		
Data Type	Feminist Self-identification	Changes Internal Motivation	Service-learning Reinforcing Goals
Class Artifacts	X	X	
Reflections on Class Discussions	X		X
Interviews	X	X	X
Research Journal		X	X

This study was qualitative, utilizing in-depth interviews in order to access what is often "hidden" (Hesse-Biber, 2007a, p. 118). Interviewing served as a powerful data collection strategy that was used to probe the perspectives and thinking of the interviewees in relation to their experiences with feminism paired with service-learning pedagogy and, consequently, sexual harassment awareness and prevention. Interviews were open-ended and semi-structured (Hesse-Biber, 2007a). Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. See Table 2 for a list of interview questions.

Data Sources

In order to develop a data collection plan, the first author created a data collection matrix (adapted from Sagor, 1999, p. 45) as shown in Table 1. The matrix involves action researchers identifying their research questions and then lists three sources of triangulated data for each phenomenon studied. Bias was minimized through triangulation of the data, by "collecting multiple sources of data" for all areas of study (Sagor, 1999, p. 43). For the phenomenon of feminist self-identification, the data sources used were course artifacts (e.g., projects, papers, journals), notes on class discussions, research journal, and interview data. For the phenomenon of changes in internal motivation (or locus of control), the data sources used were interview data, research journal, and course artifacts. For the phenomenon of service-learning

Table 2: *Interview Questions*

No.	Question
1	How did you feel about the course?
2	Did these feelings change throughout the semester?
3	How did taking this course affect your life outside of class, if at all?
4	Did you apply what you learned in class to your life?
5	If so, how? Describe your feelings about the material covered in the class: readings, projects, discussions, videos, guest speakers.
6	Discuss your feelings about the issue of sexual harassment in the school.
7	Do you view the issue of sexual harassment differently since taking this class? If so, how?
8	What do you feel is the most important thing you learned in the class and why?
9	What are you feelings about feminism then and now (before the course and one year later)?

Note. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

reinforcing course goals, the data sources used were reflections on class discussions, interview data, and research journal. In general, course artifacts and the research journal were used as evidence of student growth.

The first author interviewed all participants on their individual impressions of the impact of the course and of the feminist service-learning projects. The first author conducted the interviews *one year after* the course ended to determine what participants remembered about the course, and if they retained the course objectives over time. Transcripts were cross-checked with original recordings. To assess authenticity in the interview data, participants member-checked their individual transcripts to ensure authenticity. Upon the request of participants the first author made a few additions to the transcripts in terms of clarifying responses.

Finally, the first author used a journal as an additional source of data, which consisted of a mix of field notes and reflections. Moch and Cameron (2000) discussed the importance of using journals to assist in processing the experience of conducting research. Wolf (1996) described the importance of analyzing one's research experiences in terms that use "intuition, feelings, and viewpoint" (as cited in Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000, p. 690). The first author kept a journal before, during, and after teaching the course to record her thoughts, observations, and impressions. For example, in order to better understand elicited student responses and to assist in processing the experience of conducting research and teaching the course itself, the first author recorded daily events (field notes). The first author discussed what occurred in class that particular day, the challenges she faced in the course, and things that occurred outside of the classroom relevant to the goals of the study (reflection).

Data Analysis

Helping to decipher the relationships between society and language is one of the goals of qualitative research, and, in this case, with qualitatively-based action research. We used feminist discourse analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007) to find commonalities, anomalies, and omissions within the artifacts, field notes, and interview transcripts. Feminist discourse analysis was chosen because its purpose is to examine the ways in which patriarchal norms and male-centeredness are transmitted through language (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

We first used initial coding to create manageable data segments. The initial codes emerging from the data were all gender-based and included the following: intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), feminism, importance of language, and repercussions of language. Although these do not represent all of the codes in this analysis, they present the reader with a clear idea of how we conducted these analyses. We used constant comparative analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in order to elicit initial codes from the data. We read all excerpts from interview transcripts and course artifacts representing initial, or literal, codes multiple times and compared them to develop focused codes fitting the data. Focused coding, as defined by Hesse-Biber (2007b),

> differs from 'literal' [or initial] coding in that you are not placing a 'label' on something to describe what it is, but rather you are looking for a code description that allows you to develop an understanding or interpretation of what your respondents are saying. . . . focused coding means to sort your literal codes into more abstract categories. . . . [in order to] generate theoretical ideas. (p. 334)

Our use of focused coding reduced the data by identifying and combining initial codes into larger categories, which we developed into the broader themes of this study.

Two prevalent initial codes were the importance of language and the repercussions of language. Examining these codes in the content of the entirety of the data, we ultimately placed them under the broader umbrella of "personal growth and changes in social interactions." Focused coding led the first author to encompass the initial code of feminism into the code of "feminist identification." The initial code of "locus of control" became the more focused code of "internal locus of control." Five themes emerged from this process of analysis: feminist identification, the impact of service-learning and the connections to school and community, sexual harassment as a problem in the school, internal locus of control (heightened internal motivation in participants), and personal growth and changes in language interactions.

Participants

All participants in this study attended an alternative high school in the Midwest. The school had an approximate maximum population of 80 students and was labeled 100 percent at risk. The teachers participated in what were deemed innovative pedagogical techniques by the alternative school's administration, such as service-learning, block scheduling, alternative assessment, and cross-curricular/interdisciplinary instruction. The most common reason for female student enrollment was conflict with other students (both physical and nonphysical) which resulted in suspensions or expulsions, and labeled them at-risk for school failure. Based on documented percentages of female students' reasons for enrollment, they received more severe consequences for engaging in violent behaviors than their male counterparts because of the stereotypes of appropriate female behavior. The course consisted of 20 female students who opted to register for it; all 20 students elected to participate in the study. See Tables 3 and 4 for demographic information on participants.

Table 3: *Participant Ethnicity/Race*

Ethnicity/Race	African American		Hispanic/ Latina		White/Euro-American		Multiracial	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
	8	40	1	5	9	45	2	10

N = 20 Females

Table 4: *Participant Free and Reduced Lunch*

Free/Reduced Lunch	Free		Reduced		Full-priced	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
	7	35	*1*	5	*12*	60

N=20 *Females*

Participants tended to exhibit a disconnection from school and learning in general. Perhaps because they traditionally had not experienced school success, they wrapped themselves in the protective covering of "I don't care." Most of the participants also tended to exhibit an external locus of control in the school setting; in other words, they attributed life events to factors beyond their control. Exacerbating this, they lived within a male-dominated (males constituted 75% of the overall student population) and oppressive school culture (demonstrated by high levels of sexual harassment), which further limited their sense of control.

Course Curriculum

The course encompassed the following areas: (a) examinations of gender roles in general and in literature, (b) gender history in the U.S., (c) global feminist activism, (d) content on sex dynamics and aggression, (d) media literacy, (e) sexual harassment and strategies to deal with it, and (f) assertiveness training. The course was 18 weeks in length, and it was broken up into three six-week marking periods. The class met one hour each day for five days per. See Appendix for course topics and texts.

The first author implemented the course curriculum via feminist pedagogy, which involves consciousness-raising, or "naming experiences of oppression," in order to understand unequal power, examining topics that make us uncomfortable, and, ultimately, engaging students "in political discussion of gender injustice" (Malka Fisher, 2001, p. 44). The class was run as a student-centered environment; such an atmosphere was intended to empower participants to feel safe and in control of their surroundings. An additional area of focus was to facilitate group cohesion through team-building exercises in order to promote peer group responsibility and bonding among the participants. The first author stressed the importance of female friendship to deepen the bonds between participants and to further promote peer-group responsibility.

The course began with an overview of service-learning. To reinforce course objectives, participants researched feminist projects previously created by activists (e.g., Service Learning and Women's Studies, n.d.). They then developed their own ideas for projects they could implement within their school and community. Participants learned of the origins of women's secondary status, definitions of feminism, the effects of sexism and sexist language usage, and media literacy. A variety of female guest speakers also came to the class: the city's mayor, a domestic violence shelter worker, a judge, and an author.

Perhaps the most salient curricular topic for students was the unit on media literacy/advertising. After the first author provided content, the students engaged in class discussions and viewed Jean Kilbourne and colleagues (1979) film on analyzing media images for sexist content, *Killing Us Softly*. Students then compared media representations of women today with those portrayed in the classic film. Ultimately, students conducted their own content analyses of the media images around them. Some analyzed song lyrics, some dissected magazine advertisements, and some examined film content. This project represented a turning point in the course. Students began not only to connect with one another, but they also made connections between sexist

media practices and degrading representations of women with what they faced in their own school. This unit was a bit of a collective "click" moment.

Service-Learning: Student-Directed Projects

Participants completed three service-learning projects during the semester dealing with domestic violence with one non-profit organization. This particular non-profit is a county-wide project to end domestic violence and sexual assault, providing a variety of services for the community including: assault response, emergency hotline, domestic violence and sexual assault counseling for victims and families, and a shelter facility. A community outreach liaison from the organization came to speak to the class about dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and global violence against women. They deemed the first project "Hanging up the Violence." Their goal was to raise awareness about the global issue of violence against women. Participants found information on the topic of global violence against women (data, personal stories, photos, statistics, etc.), and decorated clothing items with this information. Participants invited classmates, family, community members, and school district officials to view their work. Donations collecting during this viewing were used to purchase products needed by the non-profit; additional donated items were collected within the school.

Another project the students devised to support the non-profit was a bake sale during parent-teacher conferences. They created flyers that they mailed to parents and posters to hang within the school to advertise the project. They obtained the necessary food items, baked, and set up a table at parent-teacher conferences, which occurred over two weekday evenings. The participants signed up to work shifts. They ran the bake sale by donation only, so they were required to inform the public and parents about the cause for which they were raising money. At the end of the two evenings, the participants raised approximately $300. They used this money, along with the money raised from the "Hanging up the Violence" project, to purchase needed items for the non-profit.

Participants deemed the third project the "teddy bear email action project." For this project they wrote emails to community members, neighboring schools, family members, and friends to obtain new teddy bears for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. They also placed donation boxes around their school and in other schools within the district. In a few weeks they collected over 200 bears. Assault responders working at the non-profit provided these bears to domestic violence and sexual assault victims.

Results

As stated previously, we identified five common themes in the data: feminist identification, the impact of service-learning and the connections to school and community, sexual harassment as a problem in the school, internal locus of control (heightened internal motivation in participants), and personal growth and changes in language interactions. These five themes are both related and interconnected. For the purposes of this analysis we pulled examples that demonstrated the strongest tenets pertaining to each theme, although many excerpts contain elements of multiple themes.

Feminist Identification

All participants addressed the importance of feminism in their lives one year after the course ended, as demonstrated by personal interviews. They learned that feminism was a beneficial frame of reference to have. Data illustrate the importance of feminist identification in the lives and minds of the participants and how they used this philosophy to make connections with others around them both during and after the end of the course:

> The word feminist means when you stand up for women and want to see women achieve, and give them encouraging advice. People who have not taken this class

> probably think it [feminism] is all about downing men, saying negative things about them, and saying we are better than them. I feel the need to let people know what the word feminist really means. I think some people might have a problem with the term because it sounds like something dominating. Some people think it means to be anti-man. (Nairobe, personal communication, 2012)

The importance of defining feminism and educating others about it was meaningful to Nairobe and other participants. They communicated concern that people have a false impression of the word, which they felt only served to keep people from understanding one another and prevents women from joining forces for a common purpose:

> We live in a male dominated world, where women are taught to look at things from a male's perspective. Instead of women and young girls growing up and being taught right from wrong, or good and bad, we are taught to degrade and disrespect one another. It is important that women don't look at things from a male's point of view, because we begin to think that we are better than one another, and we start labeling one another. It is also important that women look at things from a feminist point of view. I believe that if more women would look at things in this way, there would be less women labeling and degrading one another. (Dee, class artifact, 2011)

Dee, like Nairobe, expressed that feminism can be beneficial for all women. Without it, Dee indicated that women may experience negative consequences, such as being labeled and degraded. Cherise noted how the course inspired her to identify as a feminist and she came to also ultimately identify with other females—whereas previously she had seen them as adversaries—thereby implying the benefits of feminism:

> I am a feminist because I feel that women should be treated equally; a lot of people are not getting treated equally. Songs are coming out calling females all types of names. Men think that women can't do what they do. They think they shouldn't do it. At first I thought the class was boring. And I was in there with a lot of females; I really did not get along with females. I started to like the class. I used to say that songs don't matter, but they do, or women would not get treated the way they do. I learned to stop degrading women just because of what they wear. (Cherise, personal communication, 2012)

Cherise placed feminism in the context of equality. She expressed fear at the prospect of an all-girls course at the beginning (class artifact, 2011), as did many of the girls, but over time she learned to identify with other girls. In the beginning she could not see a connection between how she spoke to other girls and how they spoke to her in return (course artifacts, 2011).

April also spoke of her feminism in terms of equal rights:

> I believe that women and men should have equal rights. Really I never thought of myself as a feminist until I started coming to this school. It's new to me. I look at it now like, why do we get treated like that? I be [sic] thinking about it a lot, and I tell my mama, "that's degrading and stuff." I never heard of a women's studies class in my life. I thought it was going to be bad, but it turned out to be a fun class. We got along; we worked together. It made me see that a woman should not be getting abused. Before I took this class, I thought that women deserved this. Or, I would say things like, "a woman gives a man a reason to hit her." But when I took the class it made me think differently—that women don't deserve this. Nobody does. (April, personal communication, 2012)

April learned to stop victim-blaming and that there was strength to be found in bonding with other girls and women. She expressed a desire to educate other girls and women on the ideas and strategies she learned in the course. Dominique also expressed a change in personal philosophy as a result of the course:

> After I took this course I would say I'm a feminist. It changed my whole outlook on the way I should be and how I should act because I am a woman and I need to have more respect for myself and not sit there and take being called a ho. I think men show more respect for me now that I have more respect for myself. I think deep down a lot of people don't feel that they're feminists because they don't know the real term feminist because people use it the wrong way. (Dominique, personal communication, 2012)

In the context of her own transformation, Dominique became concerned about terminology and language usage: her own, that of her classmates, and that of the members of her community.

At the end of the semester, all participants indicated that they gained more respect for self and others as a result of coursework (course artifacts, 2011; personal reflections, 2012). They learned to stand up for themselves and others because of their realization of the common problems faced by girls and women; thus, they began identifying with other girls and women along these lines.

There was also an increase in media literacy through which participants applied what they learned in the course to the larger culture. Students identified a relationship between media images of women and the treatment they received from their male counterparts; they saw certain media images of women as negative and damaging (course artifacts, 2011). In short, the participants exhibited a change toward a feminist consciousness, which promoted many additional behavioral changes. For example, participants altered their language to become less degrading to women in general and more egalitarian: they corrected the language of other students to be less degrading in general (Martin, research journal, 2011), and they stood up for themselves and for others when faced with degrading or harassing treatment.

The Impact of Service-Learning: Connections to School and Community

Participation in feminist service-learning projects had a positive effect on the participants. Not only did the service-learning projects help to reinforce the concepts taught in the course, but they also promoted a sense of fulfillment within participants. Additionally, the service-learning projects were among the most memorable experiences for them one year later as the following interview excerpt illustrates: "It [service-learning] helped me because it made me feel like a better person for helping others" (Angelina, personal communication, 2012).

Angelina communicated that service-leaning positively impacted her sense of self. Keisha echoed this sentiment and was able to connect her experiences with the larger community. She identified with specific social problems faced by women in her community:

> When we go back to thinking about the bake sale I generally think that all the helping and trying made me feel better about myself. It made me feel as if I actually helped someone else. I really like the feeling because that's not the only thing I noticed. When it came to this project I could honestly look and say that these women are not charity cases. These women needed a second chance and I will do anything in my power to help them out. (Keisha, personal communication, 2012)

April and Jessica built on Keisha's sentiment by expressing the desire to continue their service work in the community:

> The help we gave to those organizations made me realize that these problems are real and that it is not just something that happened in the past. I'd like to help out more organizations. I think it would be something good to do because a lot of people need to know that they can get help and that there are people that want to help them. (April, personal communication, 2012)

> The bake sale was my favorite project. We got all that money and went shopping for the shelter. Doing service-learning made me feel better about myself because I felt like I was helping somebody out, giving back to the community. I want to work at one of those places. I would like to be involved. (Jessica, personal communication, 2012)

Lucinda also expressed that service-learning contributed to her growing sense of connection to her community. She communicated a specific desire to focus her future career and potential volunteerism on domestic violence prevention: "It made me want to be more involved. I still want to help and contribute. I am interested in helping in the areas of domestic violence and with children" (Lucinda, personal communication, 2012).

Participants indicated that the service-learning projects in which they participated were the most meaningful experiences of the course for them. Overwhelmingly, they had positive things to say about these projects; of all the course content, they remembered the service-learning projects the most. Many participants communicated the desire to partake in continued service. They expressed the urge to help others and to be part of the community, and they exhibited feelings of empathy, compassion, and genuine concern for others. There was a temporal component evidenced in their writings (course artifacts, 2011), which conveyed a long-term effect. Participants mentioned their desire to be involved and to continue to help women and children who had been victims of domestic violence.

Sexual Harassment Awareness and Prevention

As previously stated, sexual harassment was historically a major problem in the school. Previous research on feminist identity development (Kelly, 2015) is relevant to this discussion. Downing and Roush (1985) found that the women in their study experienced several stages of feminist identity development including: passive acceptance, revelation, embeddedness-emanation, synthesis, and active commitment. Participants in this study evolved through five similar stages of identity development regarding sexual harassment:

1. Passive acceptance
2. Revelation
3. Emboldened-ness
4. Synthesis
5. Active commitment

Passive acceptance involves unawareness or denial of the inequality experienced by women as women. As Downing and Roush (1985) stated, a "woman carefully selects associates and experiences so as to avoid contact with ideas that may upset her sense of equilibrium" (p. 698). Participants exhibited this type of resistance when the class began. They passively accepted the idea that sexual harassment was just something that they, as females, had to face, as if it were a normal phenomenon. Likewise, participants exhibited a similar progression in their development of sexual harassment

awareness. Prior to the start of the class, the participants did not see their personal problem with sexual harassment as a systemic problem, or one they shared with their peers. However, participants expressed that they were more aware of the problem, were more informed about potential strategies to deal with the problem, and thus ultimately dealt with it differently after participating in the course:

> At school, there are rumors going around about some people and guys will look at you if they hear these things—it's happened with me—guys are gonna look at you like, "Oh, I can touch you the way I wanna touch you, I can say whatever I wanna say to you because this has happened, or I have heard this has happened." They look at me like some type of toy that they can walk all over or talk to any way—no respect at all. I have been disrespected, and I have seen other people in school disrespected. (Dee, personal communication, 2012)

According to Downing and Roush (1985), the second stage of feminist identity development is *revelation*. At this stage, a crisis or series of events occurs that women cannot deny. This stage involves an open questioning of the self and of socially prescribed sex roles. The revelations that result at this stage can cause both anger and dualistic thinking in which women see all men negatively. We liken this second stage to participants realizing that they did indeed share a collective problem with their peers, and with women in general, and that collective problem was sexual harassment.

Dee (as quoted above) represented the second, *revelation,* stage of identity development regarding sexual harassment. Participants experienced revelation after learning about sexual harassment as a collective problem affecting primarily girls within this particular school context. Prior to the course, participants did not identify with one another in terms of shared experiences. They expressed outrage at their own harassment, but expressed no empathy for the experiences of other girls facing the same situation.

According to Downing and Roush (1985), the third stage of feminist identity development is *embeddedness-emanation*. This stage involves connecting with other women and affirming one's new identity. Thinking at this stage becomes more relativistic and less dualistic. I renamed this label as *emboldened-ness*. Participants did indeed connect with their peers over the issues they shared, and, in so doing, they began to "talk back" when they heard sexist remarks and when they faced sexual harassment. This active "talking back" necessitates the new term *emboldened-ness* because participants were emboldened to speak out, whereas prior to taking the course they either sought to protect their male perpetrators or were resigned to accept such treatment as normal.

Elizabeth demonstrated this third stage of identity development regarding sexual harassment that took place as the course progressed:

> Now I speak my mind and I tell them [male students who sexually harassed her]. Before I didn't say anything; I just laughed about it too, knowing I was a girl I didn't even think about it. It was easier that way; if you say something back you feel like an idiot. But, now I don't care. Now, if they say something, I say something. (Elizabeth, personal communication, 2012)

The fourth stage of feminist identity development is *synthesis*. This stage involves the development of a positive feminist identity including, according to Downing and Roush (1985), a "flexible truce" with the world and the ability to evaluate men on an individual level. We saw this level represented in participants in a variety of ways. Participants self-identified as feminists, they reported sexual harassment more frequently when they experienced it, and they thought differently about living

in a world that does not value them equally with their male counterparts (course artifacts, 2011 and interviews, 2012).

As course content deepened and service-learning projects were in progress, participants' understanding of the importance of reporting sexual harassment was heightened, as expressed by Brittany:

> If I see something inappropriate, I'll say something. Where before I would just keep to myself because sometimes that person would say something back to me and get smart with me and then it would just push my buttons and I would get angry. If you are sexually abused or molested tell somebody. Don't hide it because you're embarrassed. (Brittany, personal communication, 2012)

The fifth stage of feminist identity development is *active commitment.* This stage involves commitment to meaningful action toward a more egalitarian world. Evidence representing this stage included participants standing up for their peers when they witnessed sexual harassment and their expressed interest in future social action and activism in general. This progression in identity development is relevant to both feminist identity development and a progression in thinking about sexual harassment awareness and prevention. At this stage, the participants experienced the power of the peer group to stand up for one another when faced with harassing treatment:

> In school, when people say disrespectful things to me or to other girls, I'll say, "That's not right." Now I actually speak up. I'll tell somebody about it. At first, I just let it get to me and bother me and kept it to myself, but I'll come to somebody now. From this class I have gained a lot of strength. I have gained a lot of knowledge as to how to deal with situations and how to work through certain situations. I think I'm stronger. (Karissa, personal communication, 2012)

Ultimately, the participants not only took responsibility for their own treatment but also for the fair treatment of their classmates. This specific behavioral change—the desire and ability to stand up for one another when faced with sexual harassment—was not found in the literature on adolescent females at the time of data analysis for this study.

Participants gained the knowledge and confidence to develop at all five levels of sexual harassment awareness (as developed by the first author). The course acted as a consciousness-raising experience for them. After the course, they regarded the phenomenon of sexual harassment very differently. They viewed it as something many people face, and they could identify with other girls in the school who experienced it. Prior to the course they would overwhelmingly take on victim-blaming stances toward experiences other than their own; they could not broaden their own experiences to identify a systemic problem. Thus, they were not identifying with one another, although they were all facing the same school based harassment. After time spent in the course and much examination of the phenomenon, including listening to guest speakers, researching national statistics, sharing personal experiences, and participating in service-learning projects, they changed their perspectives and began to relate to one another. This new identification and solidarity caused them to speak up and stand up for themselves and one another when experiencing and witnessing sexual harassment. They felt empowered to act; they felt safe to report.

Internal Locus of Control

The awareness of a heightened sense of control was prominent in student artifacts and interviews transcripts. More specifically, participants indicated that they felt more knowledgeable and therefore more informed and motivated to act when warranted. This caused them to feel a heightened sense of internal motivation. No longer did they

feel they had to accept certain actions and sentiments simply because they were female. They now felt more in control over their lives. As Jessica stated, "I learned how to handle different situations better" (class artifact, 2011). Similarly, Taylor said, "I don't look down upon myself now. If I want to be something now I can do it instead of someone putting me down or saying, 'you're not going to make it'" (personal communication, 2012).

Jessica and Taylor's sentiments represent the application of knowledge to personal situations occurring in their lives. This application fostered a general sense of self-possession:

> I stand up for myself now. When people used to say things about me I used to take it out of proportion and try to fight. Now, if somebody says something to me because of what I'm wearing or the way boys treat us. I report it, or try to help, stand up. We don't have to do stuff– just because we think because they say they love us we don't have to do anything. It is just a matter of your mind. (Damarti, personal communication, 2012)

Prior to their work in the course, most participants expressed the sentiment that there were certain aspects of life that were not open to them because they were female (course artifacts, 2011). Additionally, they believed that there were certain negative behaviors that they had to accept because of their gender. Their transformation included a new world that defied the limitations that either they or society had previously placed upon them. For instance, Karissa said, "I would love to run for the first woman president. I really would. It would be great" (personal communication, 2012).

Prior studies have measured locus of control quantitatively and found that courses in feminism can result in increased internal motivation for high school girls (Martin, 2008). A previous study of college women also found this to be the case (Harris et al., 1999). Based upon qualitative analysis of course artifacts, interviews, and the first author's research journal, we found a heightened sense of empowerment in the participants enrolled in the course and a new sense of recourse they possessed when faced with degrading or harassing treatment. Participants no longer resigned themselves to feelings of powerlessness or victimization.

Personal Growth and Changes in Language Interactions

Finally, the following examples indicate that participants learned new information in the course that they applied to their lives, such as the dangers of victim-blaming and the importance of egalitarian language. This knowledge prompted them to alter how they interacted with their peers. For instance, Jessica stated,

> When we did the shelter work I learned not judge people. Say if someone got beat up, it's not their fault. You know how people say, "Oh, it's my fault, he hit me," and stuff. Well, it's not your fault. (class artifact, 2011)

Jessica's learning both inside and outside of the classroom transformed her personal philosophy. This was true for many of the participants. They grew beyond a victim-blaming stance and began to identify with other girls and women, including their classmates.

The transformations of participants moved beyond personal philosophy and were realized in their language usage. They learned that words serve to perpetuate damaging ideologies and keep people with common problems apart:

> I try not to use the [derogatory] terms that some people use. I tell people that I don't like to hear those kinds of things, like negative comments and some of the names that girls are called. I try not to listen to the music that's out there

> because listening to the actual words of the song you realize how much the media is doing that is affecting and influencing people and not in a good way. I can stand up for something I believe in too. (Cherise, class artifact, 2011)

April echoed this change from philosophy to action: "I've changed my thoughts. I really liked the way I use certain words now. I don't use them in the same way I used to, in derogatory ways" (personal communication, 2012) Similarly, Maya said, "It changed me a little bit. I used to call girls bitches and hos and all that other stuff but I can't call them that because if I call them that then I'm calling myself that" (personal communication, 2012).

Karissa and Dee represent how participants gave a great deal of thought to how people use language to degrade women and the meaning behind language. Words were no longer just words for participants, as Karissa noted:

> I stopped calling females out their name [slang term for calling someone a derogatory name] just because of what they wear. I used to do that all the time. Now when I hear it in other classrooms, I'll say, "That's not right!" At first I didn't look at a lot of stuff seriously. Like if someone made a comment toward a female I'd probably laugh at it and didn't think well, "this is bad," or "they meant this in a bad way." And then I started listening and I realized that a lot of stuff that was said really should not have been said and I should have taken it more seriously than I did. (Karissa, personal communication, 2012)

Dee examined language both inside and outside of the classroom and school:

> I never really paid attention to how much women are degraded on a daily basis by language that's used nowadays and things that are said and just accepted. It made me kinda realize that our society is teaching children younger and younger that it's normal to degrade women by these lyrics and by these movies and TV shows. I'd tell a younger person not to be judgmental and that everybody has an equal chance because everybody has goals and has dreams and they shouldn't be denied those just because of their sex or religion or anything like that. (Dee, personal communication, 2012)

Students examined the media that they were using and were able to analyze it in a particular context. They began to choose media for its self-affirming nature. As indicated by Brittany, many participants also ceased to dismiss degrading language as harmless:

> It's important to speak with egalitarian language because people no matter what their sex, race, or sexual preferences, should be spoken to with equality. Everybody has used some kind of comment that is disrespectful and mean but most of the time people don't even realize the comments they make hurt others. People should be aware and also not think of something they say as just a joke. (Brittany, personal communication, 2012)

Discussion

At the start of the course, participants used words such as "bitch" and "ho" to describe themselves and other women (Martin, research journal, 2011–2012). They did not identify with other girls or women in media images or in life. Most adopted a victim-blaming stance when questions or situations about sexual harassment or assault arose (course artifacts, 2011). Their relationships with males were more important to them than were their relationships with females. Most expressed fear at the prospect of entering a classroom of all female and stated0 that it would not be a safe environment for them.

However, this began to change as the course progressed. Participants developed a more tolerant attitude toward one another. They exhibited less negativity about women in general, and, through presentations, discussions, and guest speakers on the topic of violence against women, they saw beyond their victim-blaming attitudes. Through their progression in the course, participants formed bonds with one another. Finally, participants took what they learned in the class and not only applied it to their personal lives, but also attempted to change those around them. When they saw things that were oppressive and wrong, they reacted differently. As stated previously, many participants corrected students in their other classes when they heard demeaning or sexist language or witnessed sexual harassment. They would not allow the user of degrading language to dismiss their behavior as "only a joke." Because of the strong bonds participants formed, they began to take initiative and responsibility for themselves, for one another, and for the culture of the school. They became more connected and self-possessed.

Limitations

During the interviews, the first author ran the risk of students telling her what they thought she wanted to hear. Social desirability bias is when participants provide answers that feel are socially acceptable although they think and feel something else (Spektor, 2004). Researcher bias, when researchers acquire results consistent with what they want to find, can threaten the authenticity of the findings in qualitative research (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). We ultimately trust the veracity of these findings, which were verified through triangulation.

The transferability of these findings may be uncertain, as they are from the unique circumstances of the school and course. It also must be stated that the curriculum chosen (with its focus on domestic violence) was student generated (via the class-generated service-learning projects). This curricular focus may have served to produce the results in a way that another service-learning focus would not have. Future curricular alternatives may result in different findings if service-learning projects are chosen that have different foci. Regardless, this study can inform teachers and teacher educators working with feminist lenses and/or service learning as in this case it proved to have a positive impact on student learning and behavior.

Overall Findings

The key findings of this study are that group identification can be facilitated through curricular interventions (using pedagogies such as service-learning), locus of control can be altered, and students can learn to stand up for peers when facing school-based sexual harassment which can, in turn, impact school culture. These findings contribute to feminist theory and theory on sexual harassment and adolescent development. However, it is not clear at the time of this writing what long-term implications the course had on participants.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of feminism on high school girls labeled at-risk. The first issue examined was the ways a women's studies course inspired participants to self-identify. When participants learned of various definitions of feminism (and eventually collectively created their own definition of feminism), the goals of feminism, and the need for feminist action, they embraced the term feminist as a self-identifier with greater frequency. Second, observation was used to understand how the choice to embrace the term feminist (and its corresponding philosophy) promoted the goals of female solidarity and increased internal motivation within the high school setting. Participants exhibited increased solidarity by virtue of decreased victim-blaming, refusal to tolerate or perpetuate sexist language,

and increased internal motivation (standing up for themselves and their fellow students when faced with sexual harassment and by virtue of their increased reports of incidents to school officials). Third, how service-learning projects facilitate the goals of feminist identification and increased internal motivation was investigated. Through examination, we found that service-learning projects were integral to the achievement of these goals. Participating in the projects facilitated the notion of the importance of working for a common cause, increased identification with girls and women as a group and the systemic and societal problems that girls and women face, which enabled them to see themselves as members of a group. Identifying with other girls and seeing themselves as members of a group that share common problems aided them in gaining a sense of empowerment and encouraged them to reexamine the problems within their own school.

Prior to the feminist service-learning projects, participants acknowledged they had little or no exposure to feminism. Most felt that sexism was not a problem in the world today, despite the high levels of sexual harassment they faced in school. However, their perspectives were altered because of our discussions of sexist language and violence against women around the world. Furthermore, their participation in feminist service-learning projects raised their awareness of the world around them and the indignities women experience. These experiences caused participants to realize that they could find tremendous strength in their relationships with other girls and with the adoption of the term feminist. Koliba (2003) found that service-learning can facilitate social networks through the development of meaningful relationships through shared experience, which was reinforced in this study. Participants claimed the label of feminist, and embraced the term as a positive label, as opposed to the overwhelmingly-held negative perceptions of this term at the start of the course.

Again, there were three key findings of this study that contribute to the literature on feminism, sexual harassment, and adolescent peer groups: (a) group identification can be facilitated through curricular interventions (using pedagogies such as service-learning), (b) locus of control can be altered, and (c) students can learn to stand up for peers when facing school-based sexual harassment, which can in turn impact school culture. The potential for this was supported in the literature that illustrated the power of the peer group to combat bullying and harassing behavior in school (McMahon, 1995; Naylor & Cowie, 1999; O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Salmivalli, 2001; Stevens, Van Oost, & de Bourdeaudhuij, 2000); our study proved the potential can become reality. Because of the strong bonds the participants formed as a result of the women's studies course, they began to take initiative and responsibility not only for themselves, but also for one another. This specific behavioral change is not present in the existing literature on adolescent females.

In general, feminism and service-learning were instrumental in changing the perceptions of these participants. Service-learning can be a powerful pedagogical tool in a variety of contexts, but when paired with feminist pedagogy, it can transmit the power to transcend. On their own, after the course ended, participants elected to work with organizations possessing feminist missions, which was instrumental in solidifying course goals.

Participants took the philosophical perspective of feminism and paired it with service not only within the school but also within their own lives. They began to teach other students not involved in the course about the precepts of feminism by correcting sexist or demeaning behavior within the school. Thus, participants desired to continue the spirit of feminism that began within the course. In short, the second-wave

precept, "the personal is political," still rings true. These findings reveal that feminist thought and pedagogy are still relevant and beneficial for girls today.

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Appendix

Women's Studies
Course Topics and Texts

Marking Period I: The Concept of Gender and Women We Admire

Topics:
Students' experiences with gender (limitations, etc.)
Gender history in the U.S.
Famous women (Notable women list)
Reading like a woman
Gender roles in literature
Language/sexist language
The importance of voice

Vocabulary Terms (introduced and reinforced throughout the semester):

1. Feminist
2. Chauvinism
3. Nuclear family
4. Matriarchy
5. Equal Rights Amendment
6. Suffrage/19th Amendment
7. Bluestocking
8. Patriarchy
9. Oppression
10. Sexism
11. Misogyny
12. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
13. Intersectionality
14. Amazon
15. Machismo/Macho
16. The suffix—"ess"
17. Ms.
18. "The personal is political"
19. The male "gaze"
20. Double work load
21. N. O. W.
22. N. W. S. A.
23. Coverture
24. Backlash
25. "Old Boys Network"
26. Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972
27. Objectification
28. Power
29. Empower
30. History/Herstory
31. Spinster
32. Subjugate
33. Subordination
34. Sexual harassment
35. Hostile environment sexual harassment
36. Quid pro quo sexual harassment
37. Sexual assault

38. Domestic violence/dating violence
39. Status quo
40. Sexual double standard
41. EEOC
42. Infantalization
43. Trivialize
44. Consciousness-raising
45. Womyn/wimmim
46. Female Genital Mutilation/Female Genital Cutting
47. Anita Hill/ Clarence Thomas
48. Tailhook
49. Glass Ceiling
50. Trafficking in women

Texts:
"Ain't I a Woman?"—Sojourner Truth
"Someone Had to do it First"—Shirley Chisholm
"No Name Woman"—Maxine Hong Kingston
"If Men Could Menstruate"—Gloria Steinem
"Sexism and the English Language"—Adams and Ware
"Greasy Lake"—T. Coraghessan Boyle
"A Woman on A Roof"—Dorris Lessing

Videos:
"Girls Can"
"Failing at Fairness"
Major Project:
Report on a famous woman

Marking Period II: Gender Equity and Sexual Harassment

Topics:
Women in Athletics
Gender Equity
Title IX
Sexual Harassment
What can we do about sexual harassment?
Violence against women

Texts:
"Women's Athletics and the Myth of Female Frailty"—Nancy Theberge
"Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America"—AAUW
"I am not Given to Fantasy"—Anita Hill
"Violence Against Women"—Flora Davis
Sexual Harassment information, statistics, etc.
Sexual Harassment case studies
Lucky—Alice Seabold

Videos:
"Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America"
Strange Justice
"Sexual Harassment"
"Our Guys: Outrage at Glen Ridge"
"She Fought Alone"

Projects:
Interview a woman you know and admire (presentations)

Speakers:
Guest speaker from a battered women's shelter
Guest speaker on sexual harassment

Marking Period III: Beauty and Friendship

Topics:
The Beauty Myth
Body image
Advertising/the media
Relationships between women
Female friendships
Relational aggression
Power/Empowerment
Assertiveness training

Texts:
"Cinderella"—Anne Sexton
"A Woman's Beauty: Put-down or Power Source?"—Susan Sontag
"Beauty When the Other Dancer is the Self"—Alice Walker
"In Search of Our Mother's Gardens"—Alice Walker

Videos:
"Killing Us Softly"
"Still Killing Us Softly"
"Killing Us Softly 3"

Projects:
Analyze the media messages about gender and body image through advertising analysis project (presentations)

Speakers:
Speaker on female friendship and African American quilting
Two speakers on assertiveness training/self-defense