How Alumnae of a Feminist Organization During Middle-High School Perceive Their Involvement as Related to Their Academic Self-Concept

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HOW ALUMNAE OF A FEMINIST ORGANIZATION DURING MIDDLE-HIGH

SCHOOL PERCEIVE THEIR INVOLVEMENT AS RELATED TO THEIR

ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT

by

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ABSTRACT

Research has found that youth involvement in activism can benefit sense of self and belief in one's abilities to make positive change for those involved through unique communication with people who are passionate about the same issue, a sense of personal empowerment, and a deepened sociopolitical consciousness to understand the complexities of social-justice issues.

This qualitative study provided greater understanding of how youth perceive their involvement in a feminist organization related to their academic self-concept in middle-high school. Six alumnae of the Girls Advisory Board (G.A.B.) of Hardy Girls Healthy Women, a Maine-based nonprofit that focuses on the empowerment of young women, were interviewed. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and perceptions of themselves in activist organizations, specifically in GAB, and academic situations. Findings indicated that alumnae recalled community-oriented affordances of activism, a high work ethic, increased personal understanding and empowerment via activism, and a multi-faceted academic self-concept that incorporates their own and others' perceptions as related to their involvement in activism during middle-high school.

Suggestions for youth looking to be involved in activist organizations and schools aiming to increase students' academic self-concept are drawn from this study's findings. For instance, youth hoping to increase their sense of importance and community should be encouraged to join or participate in efforts sponsored by youth-led activist organizations. Schools may also work toward increasing self-driven learning opportunities for students and offer an array of activism-based practices for students to

engage in, such as service-learning-based efforts. Implications for further research are also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Young people in the United States have been engaged in activism efforts and organizations since at least the 19th century, participating in major social movements such as the women's suffrage movement in the 1920s and the civil rights movement in the 1960s (Braxton, 2016). Recently, the Center for Information and Research and Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE, 2018) at Tufts University documented that the number of people ages 18-24 engaged in activism significantly increased from 2016-2018. CIRCLE (2018) also noted that youth engagement in different forms of activism ranging from publicly protesting to working for political candidates or campaigns to engaging in online initiatives increased during this period. Therefore, more attention ought to be paid to how youth become interested in and participate in activism, what these activism efforts include, and what the potential outcomes/impacts of their involvement may be.

Researchers have used mainly case-study approaches to focus on the experiences and perceptions of youth involved in activism groups, such as youth organizing groups, to identify and analyze how organizing process occurs and what their impacts are. Findings have pointed to activism involvement enhancing sociopolitical development (Watts & Guessous, 2006), sense of community (Evans, 2007), and interpersonal capacities of the youth involved (Warren et al., 2008). Some researchers such as Kirshner and Ginwright (2012) have bridged the gap between discipline-specific concepts such as academic engagement and youth activism and connected involvement and academic achievement (Torres-Fleming et al., 2010; Mediratta et al., 2008; Rogers & Terriquez,

2016). However, there is still more to be understood about how youth involvement in activist organizations can relate to education-based outcomes.

One such area of education-based outcomes that merits further consideration is that of academic self-concept. Academic self-concept can be defined as an individual's knowledge and perceptions about themselves in academic settings (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Academic self-concept has been shown to have a positive relationship with achievement (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982; Marsh, 1992; Marsh et al., 1988; Marsh & Yeung, 1997a), motivation (Skaalvik, 1997; Gottfried, 1990), and engagement (Meece et al., 1988). These studies, however, have been largely quantitative in nature, leaving out important understandings of what, in particular, might contribute to increased levels of academic self-concept.

As a result, this study sought to better understand how youth involved in a feminist organization perceive their involvement as related to their academic self-concept in middle-high school. In this study, I interviewed six alumnae of the Girls Advisory Board (G.A.B.) of Hardy Girls Healthy Women, a Maine-based nonprofit that focuses on the empowerment of young women. Namely, I sought to understand how their experiences and self-perceptions in activist organizations and academic situations.

This study begins with a review of the literature related to student activism and academic self-concept, followed by a description of the study's design and methods, then a presentation of the major findings from the interviews, and is concluded by a discussion of the findings in context with previous research and the limitations of this study and suggestions for educational institutions and potential youth activists and future research.

CHAPTER I:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature related to student activism as well as academic self-concept to provide a foundation for my study. I begin with a general description, history of, and discussion of past research on activism and youth activism, followed by a general description and discussion of past research on academic self-concept, and I conclude with an overview of past research on the connections between youth activism and educational outcomes.

Activism

For the purposes of this study, I adopted a broad definition of activism as "action on behalf of a cause" that "goes beyond conventional politics, typically being more energetic, passionate, innovative, and committed" (Martin, 2007, pp. 19-20). I viewed activism as existing on a "continuum" of actions that might range from protests such as speeches and marches to noncooperative efforts such as strikes to interventions such as sit-ins and occupations (Martin, 2007; Halpin, 2004, p. 2). In this way, I understand that advocacy and activism are distinct concepts within the literature although they were interchangeably used by the participants. The current study focused on young people's involvement in activist organizations that execute actions within this range. Large activist groups have been observed to benefit the efforts made and people involved by specializing and delegating tasks within the group, offering a sense of mutual support, and the greater ability to undertake larger tasks (Martin, 2007). Activist groups are also a

part of a larger social movement with which they are aligned, such as feminist groups being a part of the larger feminist movement, although each group and individual's conception of and execution of the social movement's main principles may differ (Martin, 2007).

<u>Youth Involvement in Activist Organizations</u>

In social movements, activist organizations play the crucial role of collecting and organizing resources and directing them towards advocacy. Such social movements may be attractive to youth and, more specifically, adolescents (Braxton, 2016). The terms "adolescents" and "youth" were used interchangeably in this study to describe people that are 10-19 years old, since the average age range of those involved in youth activist organizations is within the years typically spent in middle-high school (Braxton, 2016; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). It has been generally observed that people within this age range are more likely to join activist organizations or participate in social movements because they have less financial and familial obligations than older people, are less likely to accept the status quo of societal standards due to lesser accumulated exposure to it over time than older people, and are more likely to take the risk of participating in these activities, due to their stage in development (Braxton, 2016). Young people have been involved in activist organizations in the United States since at least the 19th century, participating in major social movements such as the women's suffrage movement in the 1920s and the civil rights movement in the 1960s (Braxton, 2016). A subset of general youth activism, youth organizing emerged out of young workers' critiques of traditional youth programs that viewed young people as problematic and unorganized with issues to be solved by adult leaders, versus a unique demographic with the potential to positively

develop via their efforts and make meaningful change (Braxton, 2016; Listen, Inc., 2003). Henceforth, youth organizing has been widely understood as "an innovative youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing these skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities" (Torres-Fleming et al., p. 2, 2010). Like the very nature of activism that fits a range of actions and causes, youth organizing groups vary to focus on specific demographics of youth, such as such as young workers and students through civic engagement and leadership, social-justice-based organizing, and campus-based organizing (Braxton, 2016). Braxton (2016) identified five common features amongst most youth organizing groups: community organizing based on recruiting membership from common issues of concern, political education that helps members connect issues in their community to larger issues, leadership development, and academic, emotional, and social supports for members. Youth organizing coincides with the broad definition of activism adopted in this research because it encompasses a broad range of passionate, voluntary, action-related, political and social issues undertaken by young people. Specifically, youth activist organizations allow a merging between the "training" and "assistance" of young people in their activist efforts by offering opportunities for doing and learning about activist actions not offered elsewhere.

Youth Involvement in Feminist Organizations

While there has been increased attention to youth involvement in and attention to social movements, there has been a lack of research focusing on young women involved in these efforts as well as identity-based organizations and movements that prioritize

femininity and girlhood, such as feminism. Nevertheless, girls have been increasingly recognized for their role in politics as the people who are increasingly impacted by policy and the decisions made in them, such as independent agents that can affect the course of political action (Taft, 2014).

<u>Research on Youth Involvement in Activist and Feminist Organizations</u>

As cited in Warren and Kupscznk (2016), most research on youth involvement in activism – such as that by Conner et al. (2013) and Mediratta et al. (2008) – has used a case-study approach. This approach incorporates interviews with youth participants to focus on the experiences and perceptions of the young people involved in activism groups, such as youth organizing groups, to identify and analyze how organizing processes occur and what their impacts are. Additionally, Warren and Kupscznk (2016) have observed that participation in youth organizing usually impacts the development of those involved (Cheadle et al., 2001; Franklin, 2014) and civic engagement during and after their involvement (Rogers et al., 2012; Rogers & Terriquez, 2016). Researchers have also studied the impact of youth involvement in activism organizations in specific domains, such as in public institutions like schools (Warren et al., 2011), and in discipline-specific topics, such as academic engagement in educational research (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012).

Activism during youth has been widely understood to improve youth's sociopolitical development, such as a deeper understanding of the complexities of social-justice issues (Watts & Guessous, 2006), sense of community (Evans, 2007), and interpersonal capacities related to sense of belonging and self-worth (Warren et al., 2008). Rogers and Terriquez (2016) also tracked that a growing number of researchers

view youth organizing as encouraging strategic thinking and identity development related to facets such as civic identity (Kirshner, 2009; Larson & Hansen, 2005). As Rogers et al. (2012) found, these activist groups oftentimes incorporate practices that emphasize critical thinking skills about real-world issues and general development, thereby enhancing the civic engagement of the young people involved.

This civil engagement might be connected to a sense of sociopolitical consciousness. Sociopolitical development has been found to occur in youth involved in activist organizations and has been generally understood as a "critical understanding of the political, economic, cultural, and other systematic forces that shape society and one's status within it" (Watts & Guessous, 2006, p. 60). As such, youth involved in activism may increasingly see the implications of the issues related to the social movement they are engaged in in their day-to-day life, which is also understood as civic engagement. This increase of sociopolitical consciousness via group's practices that encourage critical thinking in a collaborative context may teach members the skills and knowledge needed for participation in civic life (Watkins et al., 2007), leading those involved to be more civically engaged than their peers (Rosen & Conner, 2016). Activism involvement in these middle years has also been shown to be important in civic engagement later in life because youth could alter their life goals according to their understanding of their developed senses of leadership, sociopolitical development, and community (Christens & Dolan, 2011) and involvement may support engagement in social-justice issues in adult life (Warren et al., 2008).

Youth involvement in activism may also allow for more fulfilling relationships across social divides through multicultural and interfaith connections with others that

may not be found elsewhere (Christens & Dolan, 2011). These diversified relationships possibly reflect youth's development in a sense of community related to experiences of power and influences, such as feeling that the work done in activist organizations has a positive, powerful impact, a sense of independence and capability in executing these meaningful tasks by not requiring adult supervision, and a sense of responsibility, respect, and belonging for fellow members of the organization (Evans, 2007; Rosen & Conner; 2016, Torres-Fleming et al., 2010). Finally, a sense of social connectedness has been further understood to have positive effects on general health and happiness for all people, but especially adolescents, since the development of identity that occurs during these years is influenced by one's social connections (Ballard & Ozer, 2016).

In turn, youth may develop a sense of being a part of a community that is capable of making positive change that is necessary according to one's perception of sociopolitical issues (Ginwright, 2003). Involvement has also been observed to possibly benefit youth's interpersonal capacity, which is comprised of a sense of belonging and self-worth (Ginwright, 2003). Development in interpersonal capacities via activism involvement can also be related to empowerment, since the psychological processes related to empowerment may cause people to gain more control over their lives, be proactive in their communities, and deepen their sociopolitical consciousness (Zimmerman, 1995). Ballad and Ozer (2016) defended empowerment as beneficial to people, specifically young people, because believing that one's live is under control allows for more happiness and health. In their investigation of what opportunities for youth may increase their feelings of empowerment, Jennings et al. (2006) identified collaboration within a supportive community to make positive change. The practices,

membership, and general function of youth activism organizations may endow development in all of these facets. This development has been most commonly found in members' increased confidence in their knowledge and skills needed to make positive change and have a greater sense of purpose beyond themselves. Rosen and Conner (2016) particularly attributed this sense of intrinsic motivation that is fostered by the collaboration with similarly-minded and supportive peers in activist organizations that causes members to challenge themselves, hence forming deeper understandings of civic commitments and awareness of their role in creating meaningful change.

Activism in identity-related organizations and activities, such as those related to girlhood and feminism, have also been found to increase the girls' feelings of social capital and personal empowerment, which is widely accepted as a "beliefs that goals can be achieved, awareness about resources and factors that hinder or enhance one's efforts to achieve those goals, and efforts to fulfill those goals" "combination of self-acceptance and self-confidence, social and political understanding, and the ability to play an assertive role in controlling resources and decisions in one's community" (Beason-Manes, 2016; Zimmerman, 1995, p. 582). These goal-oriented beliefs can consider actions undertaken as apart of a group or individual, personal actions (Zimmerman, 1995). Recent studies have found that some middle-high school age girls involved in activism tend to feel less alienated at school, more confident in their general abilities, and more equipped to achieve higher in their academics (Beason-Manes, 2016; Brown, 2016). Ennamorati's (2012) case studies of alumnae of the Girls Advisory Board (GAB) of Hardy Girls Healthy Women and Mainely Girls aligned with these general conclusions, noting that a

majority of the alumnae of the organizations felt that their leadership abilities, vision of their agency, sense of self, and their voice were strengthened after their involvement.

Academic Self-Concept

Such a sense of self is a focus of this study, namely that of self-concept. Self-concept has been generally understood as an individual's cognition and thinking about their perceptions of themselves and their abilities (Huitt, 2011). It is important to distinguish between self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. While self-esteem prioritizes how an individual feels about and values themselves, self-efficacy focuses on what individuals believe they can accomplish with the skills they possess (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Huitt; 2011). Self-concept prioritizes the skills that individuals believe to possess, rather than their feelings about their view of themselves or their perceptions about what they can accomplish. As a subset of self-concept, academic self-concept has been understood as an individual's knowledge and perceptions about themselves in academic settings (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Research has linked academic self-concept to different concepts in educational research in various domains. Various researchers have related academic self-concept to student effort, anxiety, and motivation ratings in math and verbal skills (Skaalvik & Rankin, 1995), course-selection and achievement (Marsh & Yeung, 1997b), intrinsic motivation related to ego orientation (Skaalvik, 1997), and intrinsic motivation in elementary-school children (Gottfried, 1990), competence in elementary-school and junior-high-school children (Harter, 1982), effort related to semester changes (Mac Iver et al., 1991), engagement in science activities (Meece et al., 1988), and achievement (Marsh, 1992; Marsh et al., 1988; Marsh & Yeung, 1997a)

related to development (Skaalvik & Hagtvet, 1990) and math and verbal skills (Skaalvik & Vals, 1999).

<p style="text-align:center">Research on Academic Self-Concept</p>

Early research on academic self-concept tended to be quantitative in its focus. Studies, such as that by Shavelson and Bolus (1982), utilized structural equation modeling, self-report measures, and true-false questionnaires to examine the stability of self-concept and its relation to student achievement in intermediate school. Other early studies used factor analysis, multitrait-multimethod matrix, canonical correlation, and causal modeling methodologies to numerically score and track academic self-concept for individual progress and comparison of reports (Fernandes et al.,1978; Marsh & Smith, 1982). While quantitative methodologies have provided helpful ways to scale and track measures of academic self-concept for large populations, researchers such as Byrne (1984) recognized that they do not provide data on the connections of specific experiences to academic self-concept, nor a holistic understanding of an individual's academic self-concept and what external factors may relate to their perception of it. Bryne (1984) and Shavelson and Bolus (1982) recommended future research to focus on diverse student populations and other important factors that impact academic self-concept, such as racial ethnicity, socioeconomic status, peer influence, and parent influence. Later researchers have employed qualitative, interview-based measures to study academic self-concept. These studies focused on specialized populations such as twice-exceptional students (Wang & Neihart, 2015; Willard-Holt et al., 2013), and gifted and high-ability learning disabled children (Vespi & Yewchuk, 1992), to understand how the students perceived their unique experiences to relate to their academic self-concept.

Qualitative approaches to researching academic self-concept harken back to its very definition of one's knowledge and perception of themselves in academic settings, since they rely on participants' own interpretations of the matter at hand.

<u>Research on Youth Activism Involvement Related to Educational Outcomes</u>

Research has observed relations between a range of different demographics of youth involved in different forms of activism-oriented organizations, such as youth organizing, and academic implications that relate to the components and implications of academic self-concept. For example, involvement in activist organizations may positively influence adolescent's academic development in their greater appreciation for how academic skills can apply to real-world situations (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). It has been documented that youth involved in activist organizations are more likely to enroll in four year higher-education programs, have higher college attendance, and report higher grades than their comparable high-school peers (Rogers & Terriquez, 2016). Since research has pointed to youth organizing increasing the sociopolitical consciousness and empowerment of those involved, the development of these characteristics has been a focus with results pointing to more motivation to complete schoolwork, grade improvement, and higher enrollment in more challenging coursework (Torres-Fleming et al., 2010; Mediratta et al., 2008).

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

An increasing amount of attention has been paid to youth involvement in activism via activist organizations such as those oriented around youth organizing and specific social movements such as feminism. Within this heightened interest, the impact of involvement on youth's sociopolitical development, sense of community, and

interpersonal capacities have also been examined. While some researchers have perceived a connection between their findings related to these outcomes and academic situations, such as academic engagement and later pursuit of additional educational opportunities, there has been a lack of research on youth involvement in activist organizations and any relation of this to education-based concepts, such as academic self-concept. Further, while researchers have paid notice to youth involvement in identity-based organizations such as feminist organizations, there has been no fixed focus on involvement in these feminist organizations and the academic self-concept of the youth involved. In the next chapter, I discuss how the current study was designed in order to address these gaps.

CHAPTER II:

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study's design and methods. I begin with a description of the methodological choices that guided this study as well as site and participant selection, followed by an overview of the participants, data collection, qualitative design, and procedure, and conclude with an explanation of the trustworthiness, reflexivity, and limitations of the study.

Methodological Selection

The guiding research question for this study was "*How do middle and high school alumnae of a feminist organization perceive their involvement as related to their academic self-concept?*" To address this question, I utilized qualitative methods to conduct the study. Qualitative methods were preferred as they allow the participant's perception of their own experiences in their own words. A qualitative research methodology was also employed for this project because the aim of the study was to explore lived experiences of a select group within a population. Recent researchers, such as Bryne (1984), have also advocated for the use of qualitative methods in studying academic self-concept as quantitative methods such as structural equation modeling and factor analysis may not provide thorough understandings of specific experiences and academic self-concept. Quantitative methods also may not provide comprehensive data on external factors such as race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status that may contribute to an individual's perception of their academic self-concept. As such, researchers such as

Wang and Neihart (2015), Willard-Holt et al. (2013), and Vespi and Yewchuk (1992) have utilized interview-based methods to gain a holistic view of how participants perceive their academic self-concept.

<div align="center">Site Selection</div>

Following the research question, participants were selected from alumnae of Hardy Girls Healthy Women (HGHW). HGHW is a Maine-based, research-driven nonprofit focused on empowering girls via programs and services that teach critical-thinking skills, subject knowledge, and provide opportunities to make change (Hardy Girls Healthy Women, 2020). HGHW is led by the Girls Advisory Board (GAB), a group of high school-aged girls who are admitted into the leadership board through an application process. The GAB works with HGHW's Board of Directors and staff to plan events, such as the triannual Girls Rock! state-wide conferences, execute social action projects, and engage in educational initiatives. GAB members are those who had previously attended the Girls Rock! Conference as middle-school girls and can reflect upon their involvement to guide the work they do now as high school-aged girls. The GAB meets in alternating locations in the cities of Portland and Waterville. During the participants' time in GAB, these meetings occurred in-person. GAB meetings have adapted a virtual format in the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hardy Girls Healthy Women, 2020).

HGHW's focus is primarily on empowering middle-high school students in a feminist setting. HGHW is also the sole feminist-focused, youth activism organization in Maine, and closest to the University of Maine. As such, HGHW and its GAB were obvious choices for the selected site and focus of this study.

Participant Selection

To gather participants for the study, Kelli McCannel, Executive Director of HGHW, was contacted in March 2020 via email with information about the study and the request to provide the email addresses of anyone who met the criteria for the study. The criteria for participation included (a) being at least 18 years of age and (b) being involved in HGHW during either their middle or high school years. Hence, all participants were involved in this activist organization during their middle-high school years and could reflect on how they perceived their involvement to coincide with their academic self-concept at the same time.

Once Ms. McCannel provided the names and email addresses of alumnae expected to participate, I then emailed each potential participant with the recruitment email (*See Appendix A: Recruitment Email*) with attached informed consent (*See Appendix B: Informed Consent)* and the interview protocol *(See Appendix C: Interview Protocol.)* Two participants responded and consented to participating in the study. Then, I emailed these two participants and Ms. McCannel requesting the email addresses of other people expected to participate. Through these means, six total participants were secured for the study.

Participants

The six participants all identified as a woman and used she/her pronouns to express their gender identity/gender orientation. It is important to note the distinction between gender orientation and biological sex. While biological sex refers to the biological, hormonal, and genetic differences among males, females, and intersex individuals, the term "gender" was used in this study to refer to one's personal gender

identity, which is not necessarily related to this biological orientation. All participants were members of GAB during their time in high school. All but two participants served on GAB for two years to four years of high school. All participants at the time of interviewing had finished their senior year of high school. Participants were familiar with one another due to their collaboration in GAB together during their time in high school, but did not recall individuals by name during the interview process. To protect their identities, all participants were assigned pseudonyms. I provide an overview of the participants, including their pseudonyms and length of involvement in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographics of Participants

Participant	Gender Identification & Pronouns Used	Number of Years Involved in GAB	Positions Held in HGHW/GAB	Involvement in Other Activism-Related Efforts
Alex	Woman (she/her)	4	GAB (President) Board of Directors (Member)	Girls Leadership
Bailey	Woman (she/her)	2		Green Team
Casey	Woman (she/her)	2		SafeBAE
Dean	Woman (she/her)	4		
Ellis	Woman (she/her)	4		
Frankie	Woman (she/her)	4	GAB (Co-President)	Civil Rights Team

In addition to their involvement in HGHW, all alumnae except for Dean and Ellis mentioned that they participated in other activism-based efforts beyond HGHW. The alumnae consisted of:

- Alex, who served on GAB for all four years of high school, served as President of GAB for one year, served on the HGHW Board of Directors for one year, and served as Co-President of Girls Leadership, a girls' empowerment student group at her high school, for two years

- Bailey, who attended HGHW conferences in seventh and eighth grade, served on GAB for junior and senior year of high school, and participated in the environmental "green team" student club at her high school

- Casey, who served on GAB for junior and senior year of high school, participated in SafeBAE, a statewide youth organization focused on sexual assault advocacy, and attended Seeds of Peace, a camp for youth focused on peacemaking and leadership

- Dean, who served on GAB for all four years of high school

- Ellis, who attended HGHW conferences in sixth-eigth grade and served on GAB for all four years of high school

- Frankie, who was a part of HGHW's "girls coalition" outreach groups in sixth grade, served on GAB for all four years of high school, served as Co-President of GAB for junior and senior year of high school, and organized a civil rights team in freshman year of high school

Data Collection

Once each participant confirmed their willingness to participate, we scheduled the interview at a date and time of their choice. All participants were contacted in April-May of 2020 and all interviews were conducted during those months. After obtaining informed consent from the participants, I conducted interviews with the six alumnae of HGHW using Zoom video conferencing. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. All interviews were video and audio recorded using Zoom's recording services. A transcript was automatically generated for each interview using Zoom's transcription services.

Data Analysis

To analyze the transcripts and data from the alumnae, interpretive phenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative interview-based research methodology, was used as the mode of analysis. IPA is a qualitative research methodology that prioritizes the differences and similarities between the lived experiences of participants via analysis of a small number of participants' responses and interpretation of how participants make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Interview transcripts were first annotated with key moments for each participant being underlined and noted in the margins, which allowed for a general impression of the most important moments of each participants' expression of their experiences and how these different key moments compared across all interviews.

The common (present in at least 4/6 interviews) themes were used to establish an initial list of common codes (*See Appendix D: First Set of Codes*). The first iteration of these codes was: (a) sense of community in activist organizations, (b) sense of importance of role models/mentors in activism, (c) work ethic in academics and activism, (d) developing understanding of what activism means to them, (e) developing view of self as an activist, (f) awareness of how others may perceive their academic performance/habits, (g) how inherent interest in an academic subject relates to motivation to succeed, and (h) development of confidence in personal voice in academics and activism.

Interviews were then annotated according to these codes, with phrases that indicated each code being underlined in the code's corresponding color. Each phrase indicated for each code was then input into spreadsheet for that individual participant,

organized by code. In each participants' spreadsheet, the codes that were most significant for each participant were highlighted to make the identification of major codes present easier.

Then, 1-2-page profiles were written of each participant using these significant codes to provide a holistic illustration of each participant. Major codes for each participant were then compared to refine the original codes identified. A new spreadsheet and list of codes was created that reflected the combination of more specific codes into larger codes. For instance, the codes "sense of community in activist organizations" and "importance of role models/mentors in activism" were combined as sub-themes under the larger theme of "Affordances of Activism." This method allowed for a more organized analysis and comparison of participants' specific experiences across all themes present.

It is also important to note how I used the term "activism" in context with how participants used it. Interview questions focused on participants' experience in the activist organization they were apart of used the term "activism" broadly. An example of this is the third question in the interview protocol: "What influenced you to get involved in activism?". As shown in this instance, the participant could create and describe their own understanding of what efforts could be considered "activism" in answering this question. As a result, I used the term "activism" to broadly describe participants' experiences in GAB, since the efforts undertaken in the group included a "continuum" of actions that could be differently considered as such by each participant (Halpin, 2004, p. 2). While at times participants used the terms "advocate" and "activism" in describing their experiences, I used these terms to describe instances in which they used the skills and knowledge gained in their "activist" work in GAB to make efforts on topics they are

passionate about, such as using one's voice to educate on an issue. Since all participants identified as cisgender women using she/her pronouns, the term "woman" is used henceforth in this study to reflect their self-identification of their gender identity and how they identified themselves in the settings described.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

To provide credibility and trustworthiness of my findings, I utilized several approaches to review my analyses of the data collected. I detail here the three main methods I utilized, in alignment with Shenton (2004) and Merriam (2009).

First, all data and analyses of data were mechanically recorded and annotated multiple times. Second, once all annotations were mechanically done, all codes and key moments were identified and organized, and participant profiles were written, all written profiles were emailed to participants for their approval. While 4 of the 6 participants did not respond and 2 of the 6 approved of their profile, this participant review allowed for participants to assure that their experiences were reflected accurately in the research and that all findings drawn from the data were sound. Third, I conducted a peer debrief wherein members of my thesis committee were contacted via email to review the codes determined, the key moments selected to represent each, and the profiles written of each participant. All reviewers supported the findings with several suggesting improvements to my coding and analysis, including combining more specific codes into larger themes and analysis of when themes between participants differed in their articulation. This peer review ensured that my findings were sound and comprehensive and allowed for better organization and deeper analysis of the findings.

Through this triangulation, each step of annotation, written analysis, and code determination synthesized the findings discovered earlier with what was observed. This procedure allowed me to repeatedly assure that all codes and findings made were consistent with the major themes in the data (Shenton, 2004; Merriam, 2009).

<div align="center">Reflexivity</div>

An additional aspect of trustworthiness is the identification of the researcher as instrument and awareness of the researcher's position (Shenton, 2004; Merriam, 2009). I am a current senior student in the Honors College at the University of Maine. I am pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education with a concentration in English. I have served as the 1 in 3 Chair and Co-Chair of the Feminist Collective, the student feminist organization at the university, for two semesters each. In 2017, I created and led my high school's first feminist student organization. I have also worked as a counselor and curriculum consultant at Youth Empowered Action (Y.E.A.) Camp, a summer camp designed to teach youth about activism and train them in skills related to activism. My experience as a general member, leader, and teacher of activism encouraged me to pursue this research on youth involvement in activism. My future career in education prompted me to consider how youth involvement in activism can relate to educational concepts, such as academic self-concept. My positive experiences in activist organizations, specifically feminist organizations, provides a bias of viewing all activism involvement, especially involvement in feminist organizations, as being beneficial for the alumnae interviewed. As a result, I did not reference my experience in activism at any point during the interviewing, data analysis, and writing process. HGHW's youth-organizing approach and procedural organization of GAB differed from my personal experience of creating

my own organization and planning and executing efforts as a part of the Feminist Collective without outside guidance, unlike the oversight of adults in HGHW and GAB. Therefore, the difference between HGHW and GAB's organization and functioning and my own experience limited my biases' impact on my findings based on the alumnae's' experiences.

<u>Limitations</u>

There were several limitations of this study beginning with the demographics of the participants. All participants identified as cisgender woman and were white. Henceforth, the sample is not diverse and reflective of a wide variety of youth involved in activist organizations. Participants' awareness of the intricacies of intersections among identities such as race, gender, and sexuality in activism may have been limited because of this identification as well. The non-diverse sample is attributed to the sample's selection from HGHW, since HGHW's basing in Maine limits the demographics with which it works. In addition, the interviews relied on participants' recall of their experiences in middle-high school and their perceptions could not be verified.

CHAPTER III:

FINDINGS

In this chapter I provide a comprehensive illustration of the interviews to address the overarching research question: *How do middle and high school alumnae of a feminist organization perceive their involvement as related to their academic self-concept?*

Within this chapter, this overarching research question will be addressed in the following themes, including quotations from the interviews: (a) affordances of activism, (b) work ethic, (c) personal understanding of and empowerment via activism, and (d) perception of academic self.

Theme 1: "A place where they can really thrive" (Affordances of Activism) highlights the sense of community felt in activist organizations and the importance of role models/mentors in activist efforts. Theme 2: "I can get shit done" (Work Ethic) encompasses a sense of pride in seeing the results of hard work and inherent interest in a subject relating to motivation to succeed in it. Theme 3: "Activism, activism for women in general" (Personal Understanding of and Empowerment via Activism) shows a developing sense of what activism/feminism mean to the participants, a developing view of themselves as an activist, and confidence in personal voice and self-advocacy via their involvement in activist organizations. Theme 4: "Figuring out my place in academics" (Perception of Academic Self) demonstrates how perceptions of academic self differ between situations and a dichotomy between personal perception of one's academic self and external perceptions of this. Each section will conclude with a summary that

highlights the main findings. Finally, in the chapter summary, I highlight the main findings in relation to the overarching research question.

"A place where they can really thrive" (Affordances of Activism)

There were two unique concepts that emerged between the participants' retelling of their experiences in activist organizations: a sense of community in activist organizations and the importance of role models/mentors in activism.

Sense of Community

The first concept to emerge within the participants' retelling of their experiences in activist organizations was a sense of community felt with other members of the activist organization in which they were involved. All alumnae utilized the cue words "support," "comfort," and "close" to express the affordances of "opening up" in these activities, which encouraged participants to share life experiences outside of their shared activist efforts. Several alumnae expressed that this sense of community affirmed their interest in activism, since everyone involved had different perspectives, but all came together in joint activist efforts.

Specifically, four of the six alumnae explicitly referenced the routine practice of "Check Ins" at every GAB meeting of HGHW in their articulation of the sense of community felt in activist organizations. Bailey explained, "We would do check ins before meeting. We'll do rose bud thorns. So, we had a little conversation with everyone." Beyond routine "Check Ins," participants shared what their feelings in response to communal work on the same mission: Alex foremost felt that "It's really important to… be on the same page about why you're passionate about the issues you're passionate about." Dean appreciated opportunities to learn about individual perspectives

of the communal activism when she remarked, "We could understand where we were coming from when we were talking about feminism and activism." Casey similarly recalled, "How they are doing affects like the social justice work so much." Finally, Frankie's interest in activism was reaffirmed by "seeing other strong people… who also felt really strongly about these things," since this shared passion allowed her to "realize that it wasn't like a weird thing to like feel really passionate about."

All participants but Ellis mentioned the all-women community in GAB as being especially important to the sense of community felt. Some focused on the atmosphere of people with similar lived experiences of identifying as women in the execution of a common goal. In this light, Alex affirmed that "there's a lot of power in sharing these things as women." Casey specified this sense of "power" to a feeling of freedom when she remarked, "How like freeing it is to be in a group of women and to be comfortable." Other participants emphasized the variety of perspectives had by a group of people that all identified within the same gender identity in fighting for the same identity-related social movement. Bailey expressed appreciation for this diversity of perspectives when she recalled, "It was also really awesome for me to be surrounded by other women who, just were, you know, believed in women and had such unique personalities." Dean stated that "no girl is the same, but we can all be together," which captures the feelings of inclusion and kindship felt amidst diverse approaches and perspectives on the issue at hand.

Role Models/Mentors

The second concept to emerge within alumnae's' retelling of their experiences in activist organizations is the importance of role models/mentors in activism. Alex's reflection that "Hardy Girls… is probably the most formative because it's like a mentorship type of experience" mirrors the four other participants who mentioned this theme, identified in cue words such as "mentorship," "role model," and "look up to." Role models/mentors in activism were perceived to be "formative" for all but two of the alumnae, since experiences with being inspired by role models/mentors influenced their involvement in activism and view of their own abilities to make change. Role models/mentors were seen as influential to Bailey and Frankie's initial involvement in GAB and activism in general. When reflecting on her entrance into GAB, Bailey remembered, "There were a couple of older girls… involved in GAB and I really looked up to them. And I thought, it seems like a really cool thing to get involved in." Frankie similarly recalled, "When I was younger, and I was first sort of getting involved with like activism and feminism and stuff it was just really important for me to see like role models and people who were also really engaged in this stuff." Once a part of GAB, Dean and Ellis' interaction with other girls interested in activism caused them to view themselves as potential role models. "The different girls in the group I looked up to and they said they set an idea of like… what I want it to be just really like I said advocating for yourself and just having well-spoken thoughts… it made me realize how I should be a mentor for girls in STEM," said Dean. In this same vein, Ellis remarked, "This makes me want to like do what she's doing. And like, maybe someday, like one of us is going to be as influential as her." Similar to the affordances of the sense of community felt in

activism, participants expressed that role models in activism affirmed their interest in activism and ability to be a role model for others in activism.

<center>"I can get shit done" (Work Ethic in Academics and Activism)</center>

In this section, I identify the strong work ethic discussed by all participants in their experiences in activism and academics. There were two major concepts that emerged between the participants' retelling of their perceptions of their experiences in activist organization and academics: (a) pride in the results of hard work and (b) inherent interest in a subject relating to motivation to succeed in it.

<u>Sense of Pride in the Results of Hard Work</u>

The first concept to emerge within alumnae's' retelling of their perceptions of their experiences is a sense of pride/accomplishment felt when seeing the results of hard work, whether executed as an individual in the classroom or as a part of a group working towards a collective goal. All but Frankie referenced the annual statewide conferences that GAB entirely creates, organizes, and hosts in their perceptions of their own work ethic. Casey's appreciation for the "smaller pieces" of work required to execute the successful event, as expressed, "Those smaller pieces, leading up to like the big event when working in social justice groups are like what are most meaningful to me," was common. "I worked really, really hard on those conferences and like I saw how much the hard work paid off," recalled Alex. Alex and Ellis further reflected that they liked seeing "the work pay off". Bailey also expressed positive feelings of "seeing" the results of individual and collective efforts in "I like seeing the results of my efforts like when the event actually happened." Dean pinpointed these results as "all the girls' reactions,"

which Ellis rehashed by describing, "the younger girls like get involved and get excited about like these topics" at the GAB-executed conferences.

Inherent Interest in a Subject Relating to Motivation to Succeed

The second concept to emerge within alumnae's' retelling of their academic experiences is how inherent interest a subject relates to motivation to succeed in it. All participants felt that they were more motivated to succeed in an academic subject when they were personally interested in the subject itself. This motivation to succeed was self-identified especially when the participants were already aware of their interest in a subject before starting learning, versus discovering their interest for it whilst learning about it. Bailey showed that she was long-aware of her interest and strengths in ELA-based subjects when she expressed, "I loved reading and I loved writing and those were always kind of more of my strong suits and also the things that I was more interested in." "Hardy Girls and like my parents both kind of like, my parents, one of their big things is like conversation, conversation, conversation like when you talk about social issues. That's kind of just how I was brought up and so think in those settings, I was able to kind of speak ideas in like an eloquent way that would like get across to everyone in my class," reflected Ellis, when she thought about her past experiences that enhanced her skills related to English and History. Similarly, Casey's experience in performing arts led her to feel "most comfortable in art setting art settings, um, and like in social justice settings." Frankie recalls how her Physics teacher's teaching style coupled with her "just already really enjoying the subject" to cause her to feel "a lot of confidence" in the subject, henceforth leading to more motivation to learn and succeed.

The participants also identified the subjects and academic topics that they have always found interest in, which over time allowed them to grow more "comfortable" and "confident" in them. This sense of their own work ethic and ability to succeed in these specific subject areas was intensified by opportunities to self-select academic experiences that relate to their interests and strengths. On this, Casey reflects, "Once I got to go to high school, my high school and I got to like do more expeditionary, self-driven learning experience that was very empowering. And that kind of opened up the educational world" since "engaging in projects at school, in high school, that I was personally connected to, and felt passionate about, like, made me feel important and worthy and empowered". Adverse to the sense of "importance," "worthiness," and "empowerment" felt in the self-driven experiences that aligned with their interests and strengths, participants felt less motivated to succeed in subjects that they were aware that they had no prior interest in and had less opportunity to direct their own learning in. Bailey detailed this feeling:

> I felt the most insecure in my math classes. I- I feel like I developed some kind of complex where maybe it was kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Like I hated math and I, and I never really excelled at it and it was always harder for me to understand. And so, then I wouldn't, I wouldn't want to do it because it made me so frustrated and I didn't totally give up and fail all my math classes. But I definitely didn't like put in as much effort as I probably should have because it wasn't a subject that I was passionate about and it honestly was always kind of difficult for me.

Bailey related her awareness that she had "never really excelled at math" and lack of inherent interest in it to her lack of effort in the subject, which is a similar experience shared by Alex, who felt "insecure" in STEM subjects because "I just didn't like it," and Ellis, who was "silent" in STEM subjects because these classes offered little opportunity for discussion-based learning. While Casey's motivation to learn about subjects of interest peaked with opportunities for self-driven learning, she shared that she "wasn't excited about learning at school" in the beginning of her high school career, which she felt made her effort to learn "more of a forced thing."

<u>"Activism, activism for women in general" (Personal Understanding of and</u>

<u>Empowerment via Activism)</u>

In this section, I trace the how participants articulated their development of their understanding of activism and sense of self as an activist as related to their involvement in activist organizations. There were three major concepts that emerged between the participants' retelling of their perceptions of their experiences in activist organizations: (a) a developing understanding of what activism means to them, (b) a developing view of themselves as activists, and (c) an increasing sense of confidence in their personal voice and self-advocacy.

<u>What Activism/Feminism Means to Them</u>

The first concept to surface within alumnae's' articulation of their development through their involvement in activist organizations is a growing sense of what activism, specifically feminism, means to them. All participants voiced that with their involvement in activist organizations, their personal understanding of what activism is and its relevance to daily life increased. All participants reflected on their experience as a part of GAB as especially influential to their current understanding of activism, which now emphasizes the principles of inclusion, diversity, and intersectionality. During all members' involvement in GAB, GAB began to pay increasing attention to these principles. Alex identified the lack of diversity in GAB and the implications of this when she remembered, "The board presented as very, very, very white and like wondered, um, people, and we struggled with that a lot because we didn't want to like present that way. It decreases the chance that a woman of color is going to want to join you know represented that on the board already." "GAB made a lot of efforts to, to try and diversify the board

and things like that," recalled Bailey. Frankie identified these "efforts" when she remembered, "discussions about like, okay, why, what about our group is not accessible to people who are not like the people in our group, and how can we change that." Alex's takeaway that this experience "showed how we could work to be more intersectional" was shared by all participants as they paid more attention to inclusion, diversity, and intersectionality in activism and how these principles may be incorporated into an activism organization's functions. When considering how they personally understand feminism based on their experiences in feminist activist organizations such as HGHW, all participants reemphasized intersectionality as a core component of their understanding. "We were all kind of, um, fighting for different ideas and like, well, I think feminism is like where we all meet in the middle and, and we all come together," recalled Ellis. This statement echoed all participants' general appreciation for different approaches to feminism and how different identity factors intersect to impact one's understanding of it. Dean similarly stated, "Everyone's equal, although we may be different." Alex currently views feminism as intersectional when she says, "Equity… especially for those who are excluded frequently by the conversation around feminism and who are often pushed to the margins and bringing them to the front of the movement." In this view, the boundaries of who is impacted by feminist issues are blurred, and those whose identity factors have been historically excluded from the movement are to be empowered the most. Bailey also paid attention to equity and intersectional within activism when she states, "It's about leveling the playing field. To find intersectionality for them." "Empower young women as well as nonbinary folks," remarked Casey on the same topic.

The second concept to surface within alumnae's' articulation of their development through their involvement in activist organizations is a growing sense of themselves as activists. All participants expressed that they felt more comfortable and confident as an activist and wearing the label as "activist" as their involvement in activist organizations and activist efforts grew. Bailey expressed how she perceives her inherent interest in activism, learning about activism, and increasingly becoming more involved and confident:

> It's very much so a cycle between who I am and the activism that I put forward. So, my, my values and my identity were what inspired me to get involved in activism and to get involved in the specific kinds of activism that I have. Getting more involved in those kinds of activism had made me care more about those things and learn more about those things, to get more involved. But I think it's a cycle of like knowing who I am and what I value and putting my time into that comes back around and makes me realize how important it is. And it emphasizes those aspects of my identity even further.

Here, Bailey understood that her core "values" and "identity" spurred her involvement in activist organizations. Alex, Casey, Ellis, and Frankie felt similarly, sharing that although they knew they were interested in feminism, they did not feel comfortable calling themselves feminists until they learned more about feminist activism itself via involvement in GAB and HGHW. Now, all participants identify as feminists and activists. "Having that sort of label of like feminist and activist has pushed me to do things that are really important and that I feel really strongly about," shared Frankie. Through their involvement in activist organizations such as HGHW and GAB that closely align with their core values and identity, participants felt increasing comfort and confidence in their identities as activists.

<u>Confidence in Personal Voice and Self-Advocacy</u>

The third concept to result within alumnae's' articulation of their development through their involvement in activist organizations is an increasing confidence in their own voice and use of their voice to advocate for themselves and others. All participants expressed that they perceived their involvement in GAB and HGHW to strengthen their "confidence" and "comfort" in their own voice. This increased confidence in their voices was pinpointed to three shared experiences. Bailey remembered that "I really had to push myself to feel comfortable enough to public speak" in MCing the annual HGHW conferences, which was echoed by Alex and Dean. Alex, Dean, Ellis, Casey, and Frankie grew more comfortable discussing social-justice topics with peers. Casey recalled that she "learned a lot about how to have conversations with people." Alex, Ellis, and Dean grew to value their own voice and opinions more after having their opinions validated by fellow activists. "My voice kind of mattered in the group," remarked Ellis. All participants mentioned that their involvement in activist organizations showed them the "power", "impact", "value", and "strength" of their voice, even when voicing an opinion that goes against the norm. This development has academic implications. For instance, Alex pinpointed this to her increased comfort to "raise the hand and like really say something that like maybe wasn't the mainstream opinion… I think it gave me like the tools to know that like my opinion was valued and it was important, and yeah, just feel validated in that academically." Ellis' revealed that her confidence in her voice strengthened when she said that, "Just the past couple years in high school I have really gained like my own voice, and then got comfortable speaking and like voicing my opinion." The academic implications of increased confidence in personal voice extends to

self-advocacy, especially for Dean and Frankie, who both had difficulty finding the confidence to advocate for their own needs in learning prior to joining GAB. "I have a very hard time asking for help for my teachers," said Dean. "Having them, like asking them questions like, it's still a struggle for me to this day to ask questions in class," remarked Frankie. Note, both participants still struggle to self-advocate. Regardless, they felt increased comfort in doing so after joining GAB. Frankie said, "It gave me a lot of skills of just like being able to ask for help in a way that I wasn't really able to before." Dean recalled, "I really start to like really open up with my teachers and be myself around them and feel comfortable… I didn't like the way that the teacher was teaching, so I sat in the back and took notes from the book."

"Figuring out my place in academics" (Perception of Academic Self)

In this section, I analyze how participants articulate their perception of themselves in academic settings in middle-high school. The two concepts that emerged between the participants' retelling of their perceptions of their experiences in academics was how (a) personal perception of their academic selves changed in different situations and (b) how their personal perception of their academic selves compared to external perceptions of this.

Perception of Academic Self in Different Situations

The first concept to surface within alumnae's articulation of their perception of themselves in academic settings in middle-high school was how their personal perception of their academic selves ebbed and flowed according to the different situations at hand. Bailey's experience in a high school math class illustrates the collision between inherent

interest in a subject, motivation to succeed in it, and feelings in this subject felt by all participants:

> I feel like I developed some kind of complex where maybe it was kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Like I hated math and I, and I never really excelled at it and it was always harder for me to understand. And so, then I wouldn't, I wouldn't want to do it because it made me so frustrated and I didn't totally give up and fail all my Math classes. But I definitely didn't like put in as much effort as I probably should have because it wasn't a subject that I was passionate about and it honestly was always kind of difficult for me.

Bailey's "self-fulfilling prophecy" in this subject mirrors a positive academic-self-concept had when participants were interested in a subject, had had prior success in it, and were motivated to succeed in it. For example, Alex's favorite course in high school was focused on women writers. When her teacher gave positive feedback, she recalled, "I felt really secure in a way that contradicts like the way I was feeling in that geometry class." These two participants' accounts demonstrate the "self-fulfilling prophecy" of how different academic situations' impact on interest and effort were perceived to influence feelings of security and ability to succeed in certain settings and insecurity and inability to succeed in others.

Personal Perception Versus Comparison

The second concept to surface within the alumnae's perception of themselves in academic settings was how their view of their academic selves compared with their view of others' successes. While all participants perceived themselves as generally "smart" in middle-high school and identified the academic settings and subjects that made them feel insecure and secure, Bailey, Casey, and Frankie explicitly referenced external measures of their academic success such as being in "higher tracks," being "gifted/talented," and being friends with those considered "smart kids." Their view of themselves as capable of academic success and sense of security in academic situations takes into account these

external measures of their success. Other alumnae referenced these external measures of success and comparisons to how they perceive their peers' success in their perceptions of their academic selves. "I was in like higher track, but every time you would like kind of get like a little bit of imposter syndrome. I didn't think I was smart enough," recalled Alex. "I don't have as much knowledge on the topic as someone else," said Bailey. "I wouldn't say I was like the best student in my class," said Casey. Frankie related her gender identity to her perception when she said, "I'm one of three girls in my class. So it's harder to feel solid."

<u>Chapter Summary</u>

All participants shared similar perceptions of the affordances of activism in their experience in activist organizations. All related the sense of community felt in activist organizations as essential to their feelings of comfort and confidence in the organization. All but one participant referenced the all-women community of GAB as especially impactful in the feminist actions and orientation of HGHW, which is rooted in this shared gender identity. Most participants similarly felt more capable of doing activist work as a result of role models and mentoring in activist organizations. Overall, the affordances of activism emphasized an increased sense of confidence and support in personal and group activism efforts.

All participants demonstrated a high work ethic. All participants highly valued seeing the results of their efforts, particularly in seeing the annual GAB conferences come to fruition, as mentioned by all participants but one. All participants perceived their inherent interest in an academic subject as related to their motivation to succeed in it. When given opportunities to tie studies into their interests, participants recalled higher

motivation to engage in the work required and higher enthusiasm to do so. Adversely, in situations when they were not inherently interested in an academic subject and did not have the opportunity to direct their own learning via knowledge of their own interests and strengths, participants felt less motivated to succeed.

All participants expressed that they perceived their personal understanding of activism to increase via their involvement in activist organizations. All participants' increased sense of the relevance and importance of activist issues in their daily life highlighted the concepts of intersectionality, diversity, and inclusion. Most participants drew a connection between the collaboration with people with different lived experiences than their own and an increased sense of importance in intersectionality in their view of activism, particularly feminism. Participants' view of themselves as activists followed a similar trajectory, since all noted that their experience in activist organizations such as HGHW that were based in their identity related to increased confidence and comfort in viewing themselves as a "feminist". All participants expressed that their involvement in activist organizations and the support felt in them related to their increased valuing of their own voice.

All participants expressed that they perceived a shift in how they perceived their ability to succeed in academic situations depending on support felt and inherent interest in the subject, as related to Theme B: work ethic. Most participants also expressed an awareness of how their knowledge of their own academic strengths, weaknesses, and interests compared to external perceptions of their academic selves, such as different-level academic tracks and their perception of others' academic performances.

All findings will be related to previous research and the significance of them will be described in the following Discussion chapter.

CHAPTER IV:

DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand how middle and high school students in feminist organizations perceive their involvement as related to their academic self-concept. The interviews revealed many common themes and subthemes related to the participants' perceptions of the affordances of activism, work ethic, personal understanding of and empowerment via activism, and their academic self. Within this chapter, I will connect my findings with previous research. I will also discuss the limitations, recommendations, and suggestions for youth aiming to be involved in activist organizations and educational institutions considering how to support youth involvement in activism, as well as suggestions for future research.

<u>Comparison of Findings to Previous Research</u>

<u>Affordances of Activism</u>

All alumnae expressed a sense of community felt with other members of the activist organization in which they were involved. Alumnae described feeling "comfort" and "support" in discussions about different approaches to activism, being encouraged to share their opinions, and general introductory and bonding activities. In particular, alumnae perceived the all-women membership of Hardy Girls Healthy Women as being especially important to this sense of community, since it affirmed their gender identity in relation to the feminist action undertaken by the group.

This sense of community has been found in many previous studies of youth involvement in activism and community organizations, since young people tend to feel more attracted to settings in which they feel influential and powerful and capable of executing meaningful action themselves, versus requiring adult supervision or guidance (Evans, 2007; Ginwright, 2003; Rosen & Conner, 2016). These developments have been used to describe an increased sense of belonging and self-worth in those involved (Warren et al., 2008).

On this point, all participants' use of "we" and "us" when describing the members of GAB align with Rosen and Conner's (2016) findings, in which all participants also used these pronouns to describe the young people involved in making decisions and executing action related to their activism without any mention of adult supervision beyond mere facilitation of meetings and assistance in executing tasks in realms more accessible to them than youth.

Therefore, the sense of community, like that discussed by the participants in this study, may offer support and a sense of independence and capability as youth stay involved for longer periods of time and are able to execute more ambitious and meaningful actions, such as two participants taking on more responsibility by becoming Presidents of GAB. The sense of community felt in identity-related activist organizations has also been found to be especially important for youth whose identities are discriminated against, such as those who identify as LGBTQ+, since these organizations focus on normalizing and validating the experiences associated with these identity factors in a community of people with similar lived experiences (Evans, 2007; Torres-Fleming et al., 2010).

Beyond this, it has also been argued that the community found in activism can benefit adolescent's identity development because it is greatly impacted by social connections (Ballard & Ozer, 2016). Researchers, such as Beason-Manes (2016) Brown (2016), and Ennamorati (2012), who focused on youth involved in feminist organizations similarly found a sense of community support in increased social capital and empowerment after working towards a common goal with other girls.

Community-building practices such as routine "Check-Ins" in GAB may therefore be seen as essential groundwork in activist organizations, since alumnae related the sense of "comfort" they felt in this community working towards a common goal to their eventual increased appreciation of the various perspectives that impact activism and confidence in their ability to work with those who have experiences different than their own.

Connected to the concept of community, 4 out of 6 alumnae recalled the importance of role models/mentors in activist organizations in affirming their interest in activism, modeling activist action, and demonstrating their ability to be a role model for future activists themselves. While no known research on youth activism has been published on the role of role models/mentors in any of the capacities found in this study, in case studies of youth groups focused on academics and general self-development, role models have been found to be important in the development of a positive general and academic self-concept (Mann et al., 2015). Similar to a well-respected community that models and supports leadership, warmth, and a shared passion for social-justice issues, I have found that role models and mentors are important for young people as models for activism and seeing that they too can make meaningful change.

Work Ethic in Academics and Activism

In order to make these kinds of change, all alumnae discussed a similar high work ethic in academic and activism efforts they undertook. They expressed that they felt a sense of pride/accomplishment when seeing the results of their hard work, such as the triannual execution of the Healthy Girls Hardy Women conferences entirely organized by GAB. This study represents a contribution to the existing knowledge base in this way as no known research has focused on a sense of pride and empowerment in seeing the positive results of hard work in activist efforts. Many participants indicated that a "meaningful" result of these efforts was "seeing the younger girls...get involved and get excited about…these topics," thereby inspiring future activists.

Therefore, I observed that participants felt a sense of pride and accomplishment in "seeing" the results of hard work, especially when their efforts resulted in positively impacting others, such as the "younger girls" getting "involved" and "excited" about activism and social-justice topics. This point relates to the importance of role models/mentors in activism described earlier. As multiple participants indicated, a majorly "meaningful" result of "hard work" was the knowledge that their efforts would inspire others. That is to say, the hard work required to see meaningful results is something to be aspired to, like being a role model/mentor.

All alumnae also identified that their inherent interest in an academic subject related to their motivation to succeed in it. Four alumnae referenced specific subjects that they were already interested in before learning more about them in high school. When alumnae were aware of their interest and previous success in an academic subject, they were more motivated to succeed in it. Opportunities to self-select academic experiences

that related to their strengths and interests were also valued, since engaging in self-driven learning on topics of interest made participants feel "empowered." Educational research has found that interest in a subject, known as topic interest or an indicator of individual interest, is comprised of stored knowledge of a specific domain or subject's content area and stored value of one's feelings of competence and positive and negative feelings about the subject (Renninger, 2000; Schiefele, 2009).

As such, when participants knew that they had had previous successes and positive feelings in certain academic subjects, their interest sparked greater motivation to succeed, since they viewed themselves as capable of doing so. Indeed, researchers have found a negative relationship between lack of interest in a subject and lack of motivation to succeed (Renninger, 2000; Schiefele, 2009). I concur with this earlier research that individual interest in an academic subject, past success or failures in the subject that relate to positive or negative feelings about it, and opportunities to lead one's own learning in this subject relate to higher motivation to succeed in this subject. Such findings are underscored by the participants in this study who discussed feeling more confident and capable in their academic self-concept as a result of these "empowering" experiences. The opposite was also found, since lack of interest in an academic subject, past shortcomings in the subject, and lesser opportunities to engage in self-driven learning in these subjects was discussed in relation to less motivation to succeed in this subject. This finding could be explained in that the participants felt less capable to succeed in their academic self-concept as a result of the "insecurity" and "frustration" they felt in these situations. 3/6 participants identified these more insecure and less motivated feelings in more STEM-based subjects than in Humanities-based subjects. This

may reflect the voice-based learning opportunities typically provided more often in non-STEM subjects such as summative class discussions and debates in an English course, versus a summative written exam in a Mathematics course. This common feeling in the concept of inherent interest in a subject relating to motivation to succeed relates to the concept of personal voice, since as participants felt more confident in using their voice to express their opinions and needs, they were more likely to implement this in academic situations.

Personal Understanding of and Empowerment Via Activism

All alumnae viewed their experiences in activist organizations, specifically GAB, as important to their developed sense of what activism meant to them. The diversity of experiences had by members of GAB was also discussed in relation to an increasing importance of intersectionality and diversity in activist efforts. There has been a well-documented relationship between activism involvement and increased awareness and understanding of complex principles of activism, such as diversity and inclusion (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Preus et al., 2016; Watts & Guessous, 2006). In this study, the alumnae's deeper sense of the importance of diversity and inclusion was also connected in their minds to the sense of community they felt in activism organizations. Learning how other members related to the common social issue, such as all GAB members relating to feminism from their diverse lived experiences, greatly impacted their own view of the social movement in consideration of various perspectives. In other words, as participants grew "closer" and felt more "comfortable" with the community in activist organizations, they were better able to collaboratively discuss and learn about the
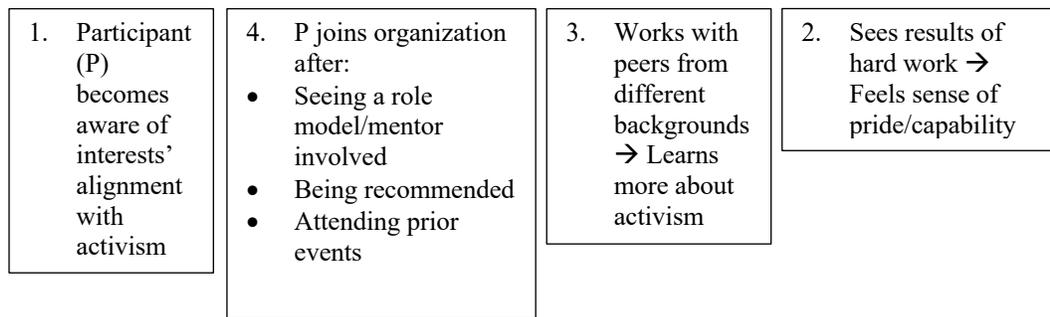
complexities of activism. This finding was especially true in the case of GAB, where the all-women membership prioritized a personal connection to feminism.

All alumnae also felt that their sense of self as an activist increased with their involvement in activist organizations. All alumnae expressed feeling "comfortable" and "confident" labeling themselves as "feminists" and "activists," despite a feeling of not being experienced enough in activism to view oneself as such during their early involvement. In fact, other researchers have observed that involvement in activist organizations with participants with similar interests and community-building practices may lead to an increased view of themselves as activists via an increased ability to complete activism-related goals, adopt leadership roles, understand the complexity of issues, and use newfound interpersonal connections to execute meaningful action (Ennamorati, 2012; Kirshner, 2007, 2009; Larson & Hansen, 2005; Preus et al., 2016; Watkins et al., 2007; Zimmerman, 1995).

In this same vein, it has also been documented that participation in youth organizing leads to greater civic engagement in later life, since those involved develop a shared sense of the importance of civic/social issues and their ability to make meaningful change in them (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Rogers et al., 2012; Rogers & Terriquez, 2016; Warren et al., 2008). From the current study's participants' sharing what motivated them to get involved in activism and join GAB, I identified a patten shared by all. First, they were aware of their core values/interests and how they align with activism. Then, they joined an activist organization as a result of seeing a role model/mentor involved, being recommended, or attended the organization's prior events. In this organization's collaboration with activists from different backgrounds, they gained a deeper

understanding of what activism is. Through seeing the results of the group's diligent work, they felt a sense of pride and satisfaction and are more likely to encourage others to become involved in activism-related efforts and be more civically engaged. I identify this trajectory of participants' initial interest and involvement in GAB and other activism efforts, the work executed in these efforts, and the senses of pride and accomplishment felt as a result of their efforts in Chart 1.

Chart 1 Trajectory of Involvement

1. Participant (P) becomes aware of interests' alignment with activism	4. P joins organization after: • Seeing a role model/mentor involved • Being recommended • Attending prior events	3. Works with peers from different backgrounds → Learns more about activism	2. Sees results of hard work → Feels sense of pride/capability

This finding concurs with Ennamorati's 2012 case study of alumnae of GAB, in which 100% of participants felt that their awareness of issues related to equality, safety, and independence increased by becoming more engaged citizens as a result of being a part of GAB. All participants of my study confidently identified as feminists and activists as a result of refining their understanding of activism/feminism, how they executed activist efforts, and the positive impacts of these efforts with others.

In addition, all alumnae perceived their sense of confidence in their personal voice and ability to advocate for themselves and others increased through their involvement in activist organizations. Involvement in activism has been shown to relate to an increased sense of the "power" and "value" of one's opinions (Preus et al., 2016). The opportunities presented by activist organizations, such as GAB's regular discussions of member's views of social-justice issues, may have reinforced the importance and

potential of youth's voice to make a positive impact, which may lead them to want to contribute their voice even more from feeling empowered (Evans, 2007; Ennamorati, 2012; Jennings et al., 2006; Preus et al., 2016).

Earlier studies on individual girl-oriented organizations have observed that confidence in one's voice improved after being involved in GAB by being "louder," "feeling recognized," and "being passionate about something" in activism and therefore more confident to speak up in classes as a result of education-based organizational programming in Mainely Girls (Ennamorati, 2012.) My study bridged the gap between activism and advocacy-based and academic implication's for increased confidence in one's voice. Participants' increased recognition of their worthiness, "power," and "value" to learn in ways that best suited their needs and increased ability to "ask for help" and "open up" to adapt learning accordingly points to how the practices of organizations such as GAB that prioritize using one's voice for important change may impact participants' confidence in realms beyond activism.

Perception of Academic Self

Each participant also identified specific academic situations that impacted their motivation to succeed and doubted their own ability to succeed, as well as academic situations that heightened their motivation to succeed and belief in their ability to do so. As described above, when participants had previous successes in certain academic situations, the positive feelings associated with these successes combined with topic interest influenced their motivation to succeed, since they viewed themselves as capable of doing so (Renninger, 2000; Schiefele, 2009). This discussion of "topic interest" directly tied to the alumnae's expressed academic self-concept at the time of involvement

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in GAB. For example, Bailey's use of the term "self-fulfilling prophecy" captures well the idea of academic self-concept, since this self-perception emerged in positive and negative academic situations that compounded interest in the subject matter, past experiences in it, and seeing the results of hard work. Therefore, one could observe a possible connection between the earlier themes of inherent interest in a subject relating to motivation to succeed in the subject and a sense of pride/accomplishment in seeing the results of hard work in this examination of academic self-concept in particular academic situations. Each participant had specific subjects and areas of interest in which they were most motivated to succeed. However, each participant also had experiences in certain subjects that not only weakened their work ethic and motivation to succeed in it due to a lack of interest, but also caused them to doubt their very ability to succeed in these subjects.

Research on the academic impacts of youth organizing has also found that youth who are involved in activism are more likely than their peers to enroll in more rigorous educational opportunities and self-report higher engagement, motivation, and coursework completion as a result of their involvement (Rogers & Terriquez, 2016; Mediratta et al., 2008). In my study's smaller sample size with less diverse demographics, I similarly found that all alumnae of GAB viewed themselves as "smart" and high performing in academic settings, much like Ennamorati (2012). This finding relates to Rogers and Terriquez (2016) and Mediratta et. al (2008) in its observation that, despite previous academic experiences, participants generally viewed themselves with positive regard in academics. However, I observed that while all participants expressed this general positive academic self-concept, they used external measures/perceptions of their academic success

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and academic selves in leveled tracks and self-comparison between their self-concept and perceptions of peers' academic success to create this view of themselves.

Related, researchers have observed that people make inferences about behavior based on observable constructs (Gest et al., 2008). Participants in this study identified observable constructs such as leveled tracks and numerical grades to inform the "academic reputations" of their peers, which they then compared to their own academic self-concept (Gest et al., 2008). Because academic self-concept, like general self-concept, is multidimensional and is influenced by a variety of emotional and social influences (Byrne, 1984; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982), the participants used their stored knowledge and stored value of interest in an academic subject and their perceptions of others' academic success to construct their academic self-concept, which may ultimately impact their motivation to succeed in academic situations.

Recommendations

This study and its findings provide implications for policy, practice, as well as future research. I detail each below.

Suggestions for Youth and Educational Institutions

Based on the findings of this study, there are several suggestions for youth looking to be involved in activist organizations and educational institutions aiming to increase students' academic self-concept.

Affordances of Activism

In this study I found that participants expressed an increased sense of community and the sense of support and confidence from the community of fellow activists. These positive feelings may have led participants to feel more capable of executing actions

related to activism and feeling more confident in general. Since a sense of belonging to a group in which one feels powerful has been shown to be important to adolescents' wellbeing (Evans, 2007), empowerment (Jennings et al., 2006), and identity development (Ballard & Ozer, 2016), I suggest young people join or participate in efforts sponsored by youth-led activist organizations. As evident in the feminism and girlhood-identification-based GAB, I found that identity-based activism organizations have the potential to address this need by focusing on the experiences associated with specific identity factors in a group of like-minded people. Therefore, I suggest youth hoping to feel a sense of importance and community become involved in identity-related activist organizations that encourage meaningful and personal action. Educational institutions can also facilitate the intra- and interpersonal benefits of students feeling a part of a community by creating extracurricular opportunities for these communities to interact, such as LGBTQ+-centric student groups or issue-focused student groups.

Work Ethic

In this study participants demonstrated inherent interest in a subject to relating to motivation to succeed and a sense of pride in seeing the results of hard work for causes they were passionate about. In response to these findings, I advise educational institutions to pay more attention to self-driven learning opportunities that allow students to study topics of interest. As this study found, the opportunity to "self-select" learning opportunities encouraged students to use their feelings of confidence in certain skills and subjects to execute meaningful work that they were proud of. Positive academic self-concepts related to these certain subjects and skillsets emerged out of these experiences. Therefore, in order to increase students' engagement and effort in academic subjects and

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senses of the subject's relevance to their own lives, middle and high schools ought to increase opportunities for self-directed learning and incentives for subject departments and individual educators. These opportunities may take the form of self-designed summative assessments and projects that align to content standards.

Personal Understanding of and Empowerment via Activism

In this study I found that these girls described activism deepening their understanding of political, social, and cultural issues. As a result, educational institutions should increase opportunities and express support for student opportunities that promote civic engagement and sociopolitical development, such as activist organizations. Youth activism and the civic engagement it encourages may offer an opportunity for schools to guide civic-related interests and involvement in a way that could benefit students' personal and academic development as related to academic self-concept. Activism in this study included a variety of actions in different contexts, such as youth-organizing efforts like GAB and service-based opportunities. Because of the various forms activism can take and the variety of issues on which it can focus, educational institutions can support the development of such by creating and hosting action-oriented groups or incorporating service learning-based opportunities into the curriculum. Opportunities based on a model of service learning in which students execute guided service-related efforts within their communities may include collaborative projects on an issue facing the community between students and community members, versus mere one-time volunteerism on behalf of students.

Additionally, this study's finding of how involvement in activist organizations led to increased confidence in youth's personal voices is also relevant to educational

institutions. As several participants shared, their increased comfort in expressing their opinions was relevant in academic settings as in advocating for their need as learners. Therefore, in order to increase students' self-advocacy in academics, which may lead to greater engagement and appreciation for a subjects' relevance in their lives, schools should promote involvement in activist organizations, such as GAB, that provide unique opportunities for the development of personal voice. Schools, subject departments, or individual educators may also create opportunities for students to use their voice to connect with issues about which they are passionate. These may range from content-oriented instances such as a poetry slam to advocacy-based efforts such as students speaking at a school board meeting.

Perception of Academic Self

In this same vein, educational institutions may also consider my findings in their implementation of labeled "tracks" based on academic achievement. Leveled "tracks" of courses were heavily referenced in participants' academic self-concepts. While academic self-concept is multidimensional and influenced by observable constructs and prior feelings, schools may encourage growth-oriented academic self-concepts over comparison-based ones by lessening the importance placed on these "tracks." In practice, this may take the form of allowing greater flexibility in and out of certain-leveled courses and not limiting students' access to certain courses.

This study provides more awareness of how alumnae of middle-high school feminist organizations perceived their involvement as related to their academic self-concept. All alumnae perceived their academic self-concept to be strengthened via the developed sense of personal empowerment increased via GAB in the supportive

community, increased confidence in personal voice, and higher valuing of oneself. Since a positive academic self-concept relates to higher motivation to succeed and higher achievement in academic situations, it can only be assumed that educational institutions may consider a myriad of opportunities including activist organizations to enhance it for beneficial student outcomes.

<u>Suggestions for Future Research</u>

While this study contributed to the literature about academic self-concept and activist engagement among adolescents, there were several limitations of this study. All participants identified as cisgender women and were white. Participants' awareness of the intricacies of intersections among identity factors such as race, gender, and sexuality in activism may have been limited because of this identification as well. Therefore, future research should examine how more diverse participants may reflect of a wide variety of youth experiences. The non-diverse sample is attributed to the sample's selection from HGHW, since HGHW's basing in Maine limits the demographics it works with. The nondiverse sample of this study causes its findings to not be reflective of a wide variety of youth involved in activist organizations. Therefore, future researchers should on the study samples of participants from various demographics, such as more diverse representations of racial ethnicity, gender orientation, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation. In this effort, researchers should select sites of study in different areas of the state of Maine or in sites outside of Maine. This expansion will allow for a greater understanding of how participants perceive their experiences in activism as related to the lived experiences associated with different demographics. The different lived experiences associated with more diverse demographics related to their socioeconomic status, race/

ethnicity, gender expression, or sexual orientation may also allow for a greater understanding of how participants relate these experiences to their own academic self-concept. Similarly, my study involved participants in only one activist organization based on feminism. Future researchers should use samples of participants involved in activist organizations focused on a variety of issues, such as racial justice, environmental justice, economic justice, etc., to allow for a wider understanding of how participants perceive their involvement in activist organizations to relate to a variety of social movements.

The limited demographics of the sample of this study could also be remedied in future research by using a larger sample to compare common themes and experiences across. By doing so, researchers may paint a more comprehensive picture of the variety of experiences had by participants by increasing the number of those that express variances from common themes and experiences.

This study's findings were also limited because its interview-based research protocol relied on participants' recall of their experiences in middle-high school and their perceptions could not be verified. As a result, research focusing on youth involvement in activism or attempting to observe a relation between involvement and academic self-concept or any facet of educational research should verify participants' accounts of their experiences with external sources. In doing so, researchers may study data from the participants' educational institutions, such as report cards and teacher comments. This would better verify and contextualize participants' perceptions of within the frameworks of the very educational institutions and academic situations referenced. Researchers should also take into account the perspectives of adult facilitators of activism-related

efforts, which could provide a more comprehensive and contextualized description of the activism practices and provide insight into the very philosophy behind them.

Researchers could also undertake several measures to gain a better sense of how this study's findings may impact participants long-term or how its findings may be better contextualized longitudinally. Researchers could also examine how participants understand and interact with activism after their initial involvement in such to gain a more comprehensive understanding of if their activism at the time of the study impacts them long-term. Finally, based on half of the participants in this study identifying that their academic self-concept was less secure in STEM situations, future researchers should pay attention to how this finding may reflect other knowledge and observations on self-concept in different academic subjects relating to one's gender expression. They may also focus on participants' academic self-concept before their activism in high school, so that they may get a better sense of how or if their involvement could have impacted it.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings from this study point to the importance of how the feelings of community support, feelings of accomplishment in seeing the meaningful results of one's efforts, feelings of competence and self-assuredness in one's knowledge about and ability to positively contribute to meaningful causes, and perceptions about oneself intersecting with those of others' impact young people's general feelings of confidence and belonging. Because these are broad feelings that impact general self-concept, they relate to the academic self-concept formed by participants while they were involved in activism, since activism involvement was found in this study and earlier studies to relate to these capacities. Therefore, I conclude that schools ought to offer

opportunities for students that fall under activism, including service-learning curriculum and identity-specific student groups that center problem-focused, productive, and positive change through peer collaboration. Doing so will help facilitate students' feelings of confidence, support, and belonging that may result from their involvement. Therefore, as found in this study, students who are involved in activism may experience an increase in positive academic self-concept by virtue of these feelings.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear _____:

I am a third-year student in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine studying Secondary Education and English. I am currently doing a qualitative research study that seeks to understand how alumni of middle and high school activist organizations perceive their involvement related to their academic self-concept. I was given your email address from Kelli McCannel, Director of Hardy Girls Healthy Women. I was wondering if you may be able to speak to me about your involvement in an activist organization during middle and/or high school and how you perceive your involvement related to your feelings and sense of self in academic situations.

Our conversation would take approximately one hour of your time and would be conducted in person, over video chat, or telephone. If conducted over the telephone, the interview will be audio recorded. If conducted in person or over video chat, the interview will be video recorded. The location and date of the interview will be in a convenient setting and date for both of us. Anything you share with me during this conversation will remain confidential and your name will not be connected with any findings. For your participation in this study, you will be eligible to win one of two $50 Amazon gift cards via a random raffle for all participants. For more details on the study, please refer to the attached informed consent form.

Please contact me at miranda.snyder@maine.edu if you would like to participate or if you have any questions. Participation in this study is voluntary.

Sincerely,

Miranda R. Snyder; Principal Investigator

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Miranda Snyder, a third year student in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine. Susan K. Gardner, Ph.D. is Professor of Higher Education, Director of the Rising Tide Center and Director of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Maine. Dr. Gardner is the faculty sponsor of this study. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how alumni of middle and high school activist organizations perceive their involvement related to their academic self-concept. You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview where we will discuss your experiences as a member of an activist organization during middle and/or high school and your perception of your involvement related to your feelings and sense of self in academic situations during middle and/or high school. The interview will be audio and video recorded for further examination by the investigator only. It will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. Sample questions in the interview include: What activist efforts were you involved in during your time in middle-high school, and for how long? Think about the efforts that meant the most to you. Tell me about them. What influenced you to get involved in activism?

Risks

There is the possibility that you may become uncomfortable answering the questions. You may skip any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may stop the interview at any time.

Benefits

While this study will have no direct benefit to you, this study may provide long term benefits to educational institutions such as increased awareness of student's relations of involvement in student organizations to their academic self-concept, thereby influencing changes in activism-base co-curriculars offered and student involvement in such being explicitly supported.

Compensation

For your participation in this study, you will be eligible to win one of two $50 Amazon gift cards via your email address in random raffle for all participants. You may still be entered in the raffle if you do not complete the interview.

Confidentiality

Your name and any identifiable information will not be maintained on any of the data. I will use a pseudonym and disguise any identifiable details in subsequent publications or presentations of the data. Only aggregate level information about you will be shared (e.g., a woman involved in Hardy Girls Healthy Women) in subsequent publications or presentations. I will personally transcribe all recordings by June 18th, 2020, and by that date all video recordings and audio recordings will be destroyed. Transcripts will not include any identifiable information. Transcripts of the recordings will be maintained indefinitely.

Voluntary

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at (774) 452-3484 or at miranda.snyder@maine.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Complianece, University of Maine, 207-581-2657 (or email umric@maine.edu).

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Activist Organization Alumni Interview Protocol

1. Before we begin, what pronouns do you use to express your gender identity?

2. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in any group that worked to make change when you were in middle-high school. What activist efforts were you involved in during your time in middle-high school, and for how long?

3. Think about the efforts that meant the most to you. Tell me about them.

4. What influenced you to get involved in activism?

5. During your time in middle-high school, how would you describe your feelings and sense of self in academic situations?

    a. Can you tell me more about what subjects/settings in middle/high school you felt most confident/most insecure in?

    b. Can you tell me about an experience that you feel influenced your feelings of confidence/insecurity in an academic situation?

6. Can you tell me about your feelings and sense of self in situations related to the activism you were involved in?

    a. Can you tell me more about any specific practices of the activist efforts that you felt were influential?

    b. Do you feel that any aspects of your involvement in activism related to any aspects of your identity?

7. Was the activism you were involved in related to your educational institution (via projects, the organization's funding, etc.)?

8. Based on your involvement in activism, would you consider your experience to relate to feminism in any way?

FIRST SET OF CODES

Codes/Themes Across Interviews

1. Sense of community in activist organizations and activist efforts

    a. HGHW: all-girls group

    b. Cue Words: "sharing", "group of/exclusively/sharing/ as women", "got

    closer/close", "same page", "space", "support", "understanding",

    "comfortable", "community", "conversation/dialogue", "check-in",

    "collaborating", "open/opening up"

    c. Coded red

2. Sense of the importance of mentors/role models in activism

    a. Cue Words: "mentorship/mentor", "look up to", "role model"

    b. Coded orange

3. Work ethic in academics and activism

    a. Sense of pride and accomplishment in seeing the results of the effort put

    into academics/activism

    b. Cue Words: "powerful", "work ethic", "hard work", "important", "effort",

    "affects/effect", "results", "success/successful", "see/show", "rewarding",

    "work paid off"

    c. Coded **black**

4. Developing understanding of what activism means to them

     a. Increasing attention to intersectionality, increasing awareness of social

         justice issues day-to-day, balancing "action" and community-building

         practices in activism

     b. Cue Words: "action", "talking", "intersectional", "diversity", "inclusive",

         "representation", "equity", "equality", "opportunity",

         "feminism/feminist", "social justice", "process", "empowerment"

           i. Subset: what "feminism" means to them

     c. Coded blue

5. Developing view of self as an activist

     a. Cue Words: "feminist", "activist", "educator", "influence", "sense of

         self", "values", "confidence", "identity", "purpose", "meaning",

         "passionate"

     b. Coded green

6. Awareness of how others may perceive their academic performance/habits

     a. Cue Words: "smart enough", "good student", "smart", "gifted/intelligent",

         "respected/respectable", "valued", "expectations", "pressure"

     b. Coded yellow

7. How inherent interest in an academic subject relates to motivation to succeed, etc.

     a. Cue Words: "interest/interested", "important", "empowered", "didn't like

         it", "love/loved it", "secure", "insecure", "confident", "excited"

     b. Coded purple

8. Development of confidence in personal voice in academics and activism

a. Cue Words: "presentation", "public speaking", "confident", "comfortable", "voice", "important", "power", "valuable", "opinion", "open up", "ideas", "dialogue", "conversation", "ask for help", "ask questions", "skills"

b. Coded pink

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL

APPLICATION COVER PAGE
- ***KEEP THIS PAGE AS ONE PAGE – DO NOT CHANGE MARGINS/FONTS!!!!!!!!!!***
- ***PLEASE SUBMIT THIS PAGE AS WORD DOCUMENT***

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS
Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, 400 Corbett Hall

(**Type inside gray areas**)
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Miranda R. Snyder   EMAIL: miranda.snyder@maine.edu
CO-INVESTIGATOR: EMAIL:
CO-INVESTIGATOR: EMAIL:
FACULTY SPONSOR: Susan K. Gardner, Ph.D.   EMAIL: susan.k.gardner@maine.edu
  (Required if PI is a student):
TITLE OF PROJECT: How Alumni of Middle and High School Feminist Organizations Perceive Their
Involvement Related to Their Academic Self-Concept
START DATE: 04/01/2020   PI DEPARTMENT: Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies

STATUS OF PI: FACULTY/STAFF/GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE   U (F,S,G,U)

        If PI is a student, is this research to be performed:

   X   for an honors thesis/senior thesis/capstone?   ☐   for a master's thesis?
   ☐   for a doctoral dissertation?   ☐   for a course project?
   ☐   other (specify)

Submitting the application indicates the principal investigator's agreement to abide by the responsibilities outlined
in Section I.E. of the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Faculty Sponsors are responsible for oversight of research conducted by their students. The Faculty Sponsor
ensures that he/she has read the application and that the conduct of such research will be in accordance with the
University of Maine's Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. REMINDER: if
the principal investigator is an undergraduate student, the Faculty Sponsor MUST submit the application to the
IRB.

Email this cover page and complete application to UMRIC@maine.edu

****
FOR IRB USE ONLY   Application # 2020-02-07 Review (F/E): E Expedited Category:
ACTION TAKEN:

☒   Judged Exempt; category 2 Modifications required? Yes Accepted (date) 2/12/2020
☐   Approved as submitted. Date of next review: by   Degree of Risk:
☐   Approved pending modifications. Date of next review: by   Degree of Risk:
       Modifications accepted (date):
☐   Not approved (see attached statement)
☐   Judged not research with human subjects

        FINAL APPROVAL TO BEGIN   2/12/2020
                                           Date

                                                                          10/2018

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Miranda R. Snyder was born on March 1st, 1999. She was raised in Brimfield, Massachusetts and graduated from Tantasqua Regional High School in 2017. At the University of Maine, she majored in Secondary Education with a concentration in English. During her undergraduate career, Miranda served as Co-Chair of the Feminist Collective, a counselor at Youth Empowered Action (Y.E.A.) Camp, a researcher on multicultural teacher education programs under Dr. Rebecca Buchanan, and President of All Maine Women. Miranda will spend her final semester completing her student teaching to become certified as a teacher of English Language Arts for middle-high school students in the state of Maine.

After graduating in May 2021, Miranda aims to be hired as a full-time middle or high school English teacher. In her educational career, she hopes to blend literacy skills and social-justice-based pedagogy for students to become advocates for themselves and others.