A Narrative Inquiry Into the Experiences of Participants in a High School Feminist English Language Arts Class

by

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Abstract

While many scholars have engaged with the benefits of feminist pedagogy in schools, most conceptualize feminist pedagogy in university classrooms as singular lessons, projects, units, or strategies in elementary and secondary schools. Through the relational research approach of Narrative Inquiry, this research explores the ways a Canadian public high school feminist English Language Arts course called "Girlhood" was experienced by two former students. The study also inquires into the researcher/teacher's stories, which are interwoven with the former students' experiences. The field texts for the study included conversation transcripts of conversations between each former student and the researcher. A narrative account was co-composed with each former student. By exploring their, and the researcher/teacher's, stories of a feminist ELA course that was sustained over time, four narrative threads were discerned. This research shows how threads of family stories, feminist language, personal writing, and connecting personal and social worlds loop together with experiences in the high school feminist ELA course, which impact participants' knowledge of themselves and the world. Examining the narrative threads within and across the stories of two students and the researcher/teacher created an opportunity to reflect on existing cultures, practices, and policies in high school as well as an opportunity to consider the impact of offering feminist ELA courses in a public secondary school context.

Keywords: Feminism, Feminist Pedagogy, English Language Arts, High School, Narrative Inquiry

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Melanie Elizabeth Glaves. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of a Feminist High School ELA Course”, Pro00122688, in 2022.

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Chapter One: Intertwined Loops: Context of Study and Research Puzzle

Crochet: "Needlework done with a needle having a small hook at one end for drawing the thread or yarn through intertwined loops" (Dictionary.com)

Growing up, I was surrounded by crocheted blankets and doilies. Maybe you know the kind I mean. The blankets were folded neatly on the back of a loveseat, or La-Z-Boy chair, or tucked into a linen closet, high up on a shelf. Doilies lay on top of wooden coffee tables, dining tables, dressers and cedar chests in the homes of my mom, my grandmothers, and my aunts. Some were whitish in colour, but most had faded to a cream or light brown after years of life and light and dust. Sometimes they held treasured objects, family photos, a vase, or crystal objects, while others were themselves on display.

The blankets and doilies were delicate and beautiful, meticulous and ornate. As a teenager I was annoyed by them, provoked by the ways they looked out of date or the wrong colour, or made my chore of dusting harder, slipping and releasing new trails of dust whenever they moved. I remember my mom urging me to be careful with them as all were made by women in my family. She knew and told the stories of the women who made them, and understood how their experiences were looped into each stitch.

As I began writing this thesis about "Girlhood" [1], I struggled to find a metaphor to represent what I was seeing in the course I planned and taught and in my research. I tried webs,

[1] "Girlhood" is a course that I created, developed and taught from 2015-2022. It is still offered in a large public urban high school, in Alberta, Canada. The school itself had nearly 3000 students who came from diverse racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The school had evolved from its design in 1961, now containing additional wings, stitched onto its original footprint. The "Girlhood" course attends to the Alberta English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum and teaches the required skills of reading, speaking, writing, representing and collaborating through a feminist lens. In the course, students studied a variety of texts, many of which were outside of the literary canon, which is composed of mostly white heterosexual male authors. The course deliberately centred diverse

weaving, embroidery, quilting, tapestry, and braiding, and, while all of these held beautiful potential, none captured the interwoven, continuing nature of female relationships, feminist spaces and knowledge in a way that felt authentic to me. And maybe you're thinking that crocheting doesn't sound elegant or glamorous, and really, it isn't any of those things. It is an old, humble art. But an old, humble, kind, loving woman named Bernice, my grandmother, who grew up on a farm, the second oldest of eight children, who moved out of her home and started working at thirteen, taught me how to crochet in her house when I was a child. She let me use one of her crochet hooks, and a burnt-orange ball of yarn and, as her mother taught her, she showed me how to make a slip knot, the first stitch, and then practice pulling loops through, over and over again. It is one of her favourite stories to recount; she giggles about how I sat there for hours making a single chain of loops, a chain so long that it ran all the way down from one of the upstairs bedrooms, downstairs and into the basement almost touching her cold cellar. Now at 100 years old, she laughs about it and brings it up from time to time when I visit her. She returns to

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female authors, poets, filmmakers, essayists, artists, musicians, and athletes as a form of feminist praxis. Students read, critiqued, analyzed, discussed and wrote about these texts and authors in a way that met the outcomes of the course, while also engaging with theoretical language. The students were also invited to explore subjective experience and engage in communal writing, reading and projects. The course was offered as a "split" class: that is, it was offered to both Alberta academic streams in a grade 11 course (20-1 and 20-2) and also in a separate grade 12 course (30-1 and 30-2). This combined framing was deliberate and ensured all students had opportunities to engage with critical feminist theory. Though the course assignments were sometimes adjusted to accommodate specifically outlined variances between the academic streams, the students worked collaboratively regardless of the stream they were in. The course was advertised to all school community members using pamphlets, social media, and word of mouth. Students could choose to take this course for their grade 11 or 12 ELA credit in place of the "regular" ELA course offered for grade 11 or 12. Despite the name, which was chosen before the course began and admittedly suggests the course would only be for girls, the course was made up of gender nonconforming students, gender expansive students, non-binary students, male students and female students each year. At the end of the course, students received their ELA credits needed to graduate with the added benefit of being able to engage with and develop their understanding of feminism before graduating from high school. See Appendix A for the Course Syllabus. I want to draw attention to my friend and Department Head, Allan, who created a culture in our department where specialized courses like this could be imagined and created. In its early stages, he supported and advocated for "Girlhood" and worked with the administration to ensure it was given space in the school schedule. His encouragement was and continues to be invaluable.

the story of how I sat on her couch all day and stitched loop after loop. I ask her questions and share what I remember. *You really liked it,* she tells me, *and when you were done, you pulled each stitch out, then started it all again using the same thread.* In these conversations, where she recounts this experience, I listen to her laughing, and I share my memories, we co-compose a family story, a retold story filled with our lives together and the tellings of our lives together.

Crocheting, in its purest and simplest form, is the act of creating fabric from one thread; each stitch looped into a stitch that already exists, each stitch needing the one before it in order *to exist*. This interconnectedness is what made me choose this as my metaphor for this thesis. A part of what I have come to realize through this research is that feminist spaces, feminist classes, feminist stories, and feminist knowledge exist because of the relationships, times, and places they are linked to and from which they evolve. These interwoven loops grow and evolve into something bigger, something lasting, something that is passed on and lives beyond the lives of those who made it. These crocheted fabrics, a baby blanket, a doily, a high school Feminist ELA course, and this thesis, make it possible to pull back loops and trace back to experiences that came before, all distinct but linked to a single thread. Because crochet allows you to look back and forth, and build on existing loops, this metaphor also helps me explain why I chose Narrative Inquiry for my study. Narrative Inquiry, as developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is the study of storied experiences, both lived and told. It values individual stories while also recognizing the way that these individual stories are linked to social stories—like ones in a family, or ones in a school. It recognizes that experiences can exist across dimensions beyond time, space, and place, while remaining linked together across these dimensions (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007; Caine, Clandinin & Lessard,

2022).

The central context for my research is a Feminist English Language Arts course I offered to grade 11 and 12 students at a large urban high school in Alberta starting in 2015. Specifically, my inquiry is an exploration of the impact the course, entitled "Girlhood," had on myself and two former students, who are now young adults. I created the course with the intention of providing high school students with opportunities to encounter feminist ideas and language while still in high school. I am interested in learning about the ways in which participants have experienced this course and chose to narratively inquire into the experiences of two students who took the course. My research wonder is: *What might be revealed via narrative inquiry about the impact of a Feminist ELA course on two high school students?*

I notice the relational, co-composed nature of both the "Girlhood" course itself, and this research, and am interested in exploring the stories stitched into, and beyond, my awareness or memory. Each lesson in the course and each chapter of this thesis is interwoven with experiences that exist across time, places, and relationships and provides insight into the course in a way that is richer than a singular story of the course —such as the story of my experiences in the course, or in the planned curriculum (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988). There are layered stories, ones looped back and forth into each other, all important in creating a larger fabric.

In this section, there are some stories that I share with you to help you understand how I came to teach the "Girlhood" course and provide context around how I arrived at this research inquiry. There is an interconnectedness that now exists between us, and this is why I am writing about these directly to you, a reader I may or may not know. I want to acknowledge the relational

nature of this entire process. In writing to you, I acknowledge the connection between us, and that in retelling these experiences to you here, I create new experiences for myself and for you.

One early loop of the course was stitched the year before I started "Girlhood" when one student wrote me a personal response about an experience when she was fourteen or fifteen years old, an experience in which an adult male took a picture up her skirt as she descended some stairs after a shift at a movie theatre. It was her first job. She was responding to a question about power, and wrote with cold, precise clarity in her response of the confusion, shame, shock, and powerlessness she felt on this day. Her response unsettled me. I could tell that she was writing this response *to* me, wanting me to know this. It brought back a rush of memories of similar high school experiences when my friends and I learned to wear shorts under skirts when we walked up the stairs, choosing double elastic waistbands and the painful restriction of our flesh over humiliation. It bothered me that my student was experiencing the same thing I did, 20 years later. It bothers me that students are still experiencing this today (St. George et al., 2023).

These stories of violation reveal important teachings about the embodied shame and power imbalances experienced by women across race, class, and gender. It struck me after reading my student's response that these real-life stories echoed many of the discussions, essays, fiction, and non-fiction stories I encountered in Women's Studies and Women's Literature Courses during my undergraduate degree at Western University. These courses explored women's writing on pain, joy, sorrow, and celebration, and sometimes I felt they were written to me, for me, even when this could not have been possible. Our discussions of the essays, fiction, and non-fiction stories allowed me, and others, to tell and retell our stories. They awoke (Greene, 1995) stories in myself, and eased some of the isolation I felt as a young woman, as a result of

my experiences. There was something in these stories, in the telling and retelling of them, that connected with my experiences. Despite important differences that existed between each story, I saw a single thread that connected us. These stories taught me a language with which to speak my experiences into existence. This was a profound experience for me, one I carried with me into my teaching career. The past seven years of teaching this course have been a joy and a highlight for me professionally. In its first year, the only section of the class was attended by mostly girls. Each subsequent year, more sections were added and were attended by several trans, gender non-conforming, and male students who felt safe enrolling.[2] While mostly a joyful experience, I also want to acknowledge that there were moments where the course was challenging professionally, because in each year it was run, I was met with resistance from administrators, colleagues, students, and parents about offering such a course. From the beginning, I faced eye-rolls, anger, phone calls from parents saying "I just don't see why my daughter would benefit from this class", or colleagues saying it was a "man-hating" class. I tried to respond by explaining my position when these situations arose, but truthfully, I found it difficult to capture the emotion and feeling of the course in quick exchanges over the phone or in passing in the hallway. I knew that any description I offered was missing an affective element that could not be captured by language alone. I knew that I needed to keep going with the course; students' feedback had been positive and compelling, but all of these outside comments bothered me. I wondered if the course did enough. I worried that the class was kind of an island, a

[2] The course has evolved from its inception when it was named "Girlhood" without thinking through who that name excluded. If I were still teaching the course today, I would change the name; this course has helped me grow as an educator and enriched my understanding of what feminism is and means. I need to continue to deepen this understanding.

temporary harbour for students, rather than a space that ignited change. The question, "What does it do? No, really *what does it even do?"* nagged at me.

My body tingled when I eventually came to read Falk-Rafael et al.'s (2004) observation that people make claims that feminist pedagogy is empowering, but few actually *show* this. I reacted this way because I know it is a difficult task to represent the "feltness" (Springgay, 2020) of a course like "Girlhood". I struggled to use language to capture the feelings of empowerment I experienced and observed within the course. I began this research curious about what people in the course thought about their experience in the course. I was curious about what scholarship existed and wanted to see if an inquiry into the literature would bring me closer to describing the impact of a course like "Girlhood". I was curious about others' stories of feminist and pedagogical practice. I wanted to inquire into the experiences of course participants —those of former students and myself— to see what they make visible and what they silence about the course.

Stories Woven Around Me: Coming to the Research Puzzle

Her paper struck me because it agitated the awareness I carry with me most days, an awareness that exists in most women's consciousness: that our bodies are always observed, controlled and consumed. The photos can't be untaken. Even if no one saw those images, even if they were quickly deleted, that moment spun a web that ensnared my student in the awareness that she is trapped knowing she will continue to be at risk of being consumed.

-Excerpt from a Journal Entry, included in a Paper written for Evil Education Course, 2021

I created “Girlhood”, a Feminist ELA class in 2015 because of my stories of experience, and my students’ stories of experience, like the student’s experience at the movie theatre. A combination of experiences stitched together made me want to create a space that allowed us to talk about these moments, and to use female authors and poets, and stories to empower us. Acknowledging female voices, valuing them, and amplifying them was one of my objectives in the course. Another was to provide a space that invited students to lay their experiences alongside the experiences of authors, characters, their classmates and myself.

Within the school, an energy of outrage sprouted in response to a larger cultural landscape of misogyny. The American presidential election was running Clinton vs Trump, and the #MeToo movement was gaining momentum. Students were beginning to question dress codes, challenge norms, and demand action; this energy was exciting, and I thought that by offering this course, I could provide some knowledge that would be useful in living their lives. Learning about feminism helps stories change and evolve in different ways and students’ lived experiences might be lived and told differently once they developed a new language to retell and revisit them. Learning new terms and concepts, being invited to consider new perspectives, and learning about bell hooks’ (2015 a; 2015 b) ideas about feminism had the potential to deepen and widen the way they view and tell their stories of experience. Feminism not only has the potential to cause people to notice who is absent from the centre of human experience, it “has either moved women or tried to move them, from the margins closer to the centre of human experience” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 3). I believe that this movement is made possible by stories of experience. Living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is what can move us to create change.

In my family, friendships, and teaching, I witnessed the ways stories are carried with each of us, moving through spaces and other people. I observe how stories then travel far beyond us and anything we can know or control. I saw this one day in 2022 in "Girlhood" after I had been approached by a female colleague regarding her concern with the way that female students were dressing. In her view, some students were dressing inappropriately. She had taken her concerns to the principal, who agreed to a meeting, but insisted students be included in a review of the school's policies around appropriate dress. Because of the nature of "Girlhood" the teacher asked me to invite any interested students to attend the meeting.

When I broached this with the class, the students were at first hesitant about the request, assuming it was performative and that nothing would change. When I asked them about this, a wave of stories emerged, filling the room with the student's experiences with dress codes and peers, friends, strangers, teachers, and administrators who monitored their bodies. Many experiences were given space, what I learned from Clandinin et al. (2022) Hanna Arendt would call a space of public appearance, and I felt the power of recognizing they had so many stories to share. It was powerful to witness students' willingness and vulnerability in this way, laying their stories down for us all to consider. As I listened, I could feel my own stories reverberate and begin to evolve: I saw differences and sameness in their experiences, and hearing these stories of experience changed my stories of experience. The students' retellings called to my own, and a kind of resonance occurred, bringing to mind forgotten moments and a new perspective (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000; Clandinin, 2006). I began to see the loops crocheted into my experience with different eyes, and as I shared some of these experiences with the class, we looped our stories together.

Alongside this retelling, I was also pulling threads of stories out completely, unweaving stitches that had been tightly hooked into the way I viewed my life and experience. This unravelling of the stories I told myself was unsettling, and some of these stories I decided not to share on that day and still choose not to share. I began to be aware of all the silent stories in the room that day, both in the students who spoke only some of their stories, and the ones who shared no stories at all. I continue to think about those silent stories and their "thereness" and importance.

My supervisor, Dr. Lessard, who was also working within the school teaching another course, was in the classroom that day. He sometimes stopped by the "Girlhood" classroom to connect with the students and to listen to what we were talking about. The students got to know him and over time, accepted him as a member of the class. When I asked the class what we might do with these stories concerning the dress code meeting, the students offered ideas and then Dr. Lessard suggested we think about making t-shirts as a form of expression and activism. The students were immediately on board, invested in designing what would be on our bodies, and what message(s) we would present to the world. Over the next few weeks, the students brainstormed designs, colours, and words, working to capture the experience of the course and what it meant to be in it. We talked and voted before settling on bluebell flowers to represent us, flowers that symbolize truth, gratitude and love, and that also served as an homage to bell hooks, who the students admired and wanted to recognize. One student, an artist, turned our sketches into something beautiful, creating three versions before the class voted

Figure 1: The image from the "Girlhood" T-shirt.

on a single image. The shirts were printed, and each of the students in the class wore theirs proudly in the hallways, to the dress-code meeting, and in their worlds beyond the school.

When someone asks about the course and what it "does", I find it difficult to explain this quickly or in passing. Many of the stories of the class, like the ones described above, are woven within and around the course itself; when told, each story provides nuanced glimpses into the course, reflecting different and specific places and times. All the stories of the course are important stories; however, I am aware that *my* stories from the course, while valuable, are my stories, told out of my experience. This awareness helped confirm that it would be necessary that my research be conducted alongside research participants, instead of alone, in order that I might hear diverse stories from former students in addition to my own. The act of hearing many stories is a slow, relational process, and inquiring into the stories of "Girlhood" required a methodology like Narrative Inquiry that encouraged me to look into others' stories alongside my own and see what I might find.

The Research Puzzle

In this Narrative Inquiry, I inquired into the experiences of two young women, Alison and Maria, who engaged in the "Girlhood" class. In Narrative Inquiry, a relational inquiry, I too, am under study. In the inquiry into Alison and Maria's experiences, I also inquired into my experiences of teaching and living alongside the students in the class within a large urban high school. By inquiring into and noticing the threads woven across three people's stories of the course —Alison's, Maria's and my own— I aimed to more clearly understand how the "Girlhood" class has shaped both me and the two students who joined me in the inquiry.

Personal, Practical and Social Justifications

The purpose of my research is to inquire into the experiences of two students within and beyond the "Girlhood" course via Narrative Inquiry. "Girlhood" responds to bell hooks'(2015b) observation that more needs to be done in academia to gear feminist practice toward youth (p. 23). Much of the discussion in the literature is centred on the academy and university classrooms and on the scholars in these rooms. Those who do discuss secondary classrooms discuss feminist strategies, but many do this in quick bursts of lists or in brief overviews of units, lessons, or single projects (Roy and Shen, 1991; Shrewsbury, 1997; Bruce, 2008; Fearon, 2018; Blake, 2021). I hope that I can contribute a different voice and view in exploring an entire Feminist ELA course that is sustained over time.

Jimenez (2016) and Troutman and Jimenez (2016), whose work is most relevant to my own inquiry, explore and champion the potential of feminist ELA courses in schools. Jimenez sees and advocates for the inclusion of feminism in schools and has created online campaigns like #HSFeminism and #K12feminism to create community and the exchange of ideas amongst feminist educators. Jimenez and Troutman certainly see the potential of feminism in schools to help students engage in activism. They include the voices of students in their work and make important contributions to feminism's potential for students in school. The application of their work does situate itself within a specific context: most notably universities or an expensive private progressive school in Manhattan. This made me aware of a small gap in the literature that allows my work to begin to loop in new stitches, both connected to and distinct from theirs. As someone who has always worked within a public school setting, I offer insight into my

experiences of imagining, gaining approval for, creating, teaching, and sustaining a feminist course in a public school system.

By engaging in a narrative inquiry alongside two former students and exploring the co-composed stories of "Girlhood", I intend this research to provide Feminist ELA teachers with insight into the strengths, challenges and potentialities provided by such courses. My practical justification for this work is that I intend this research to begin to shape the possibility of other spaces in high schools for students to engage in studying their experiences within a context of feminist thinking and writing. My personal justification is that this research is for myself and is a response to my own curiosity, to see what I can learn from the stories told and retold within it.

Chapter Two: Seeing Feminism as Crochet: A Critical Literature Review

"A granny square is a piece of square fabric produced in crochet by working in rounds from the center outward. Granny squares are traditionally handmade" (CollinsDictionary.com)

Figure 2: A granny square from a baby blanket made for my son.

Right before I gave birth to my son, I began to seek out more complicated crochet patterns that used more than a single ball of yarn. I wanted to make a blanket for my baby, a first gift, the way my mom and grandma had done for me. This type of offering, giving blankets to a new mom, is a ritual for the women in my family. These neat and careful blankets, their soft inviting colours, represent the love, hope and protection felt in a family before a new baby arrives. I wonder if you know the kind I mean, and if there is a special blanket or tradition like this stitched into your family story.

In the weeks before my son, Henry, was born I received blankets from my mom, mother-in-law, and aunts. They were blankets they had just made, ones used by my brother and me that my mom had pulled down from the linen closet. Despite treasuring all of these, I felt compelled to make a blanket of my own. I wanted to make something with many colours and knew that if I was going to do this, I needed to learn how to make Granny Squares. I bought several balls of soft, colourful wool and slowly, I began to learn from my mom and mother-in-law, how to begin a single loop of stitches, then looping and weaving the circle outward. There are slight variations in the patterns used in Granny Squares, depending on family tradition or culture; all Granny Squares are unique, varying colours in each circular row, tying a new thread in seamlessly with the last, until the round becomes more square-like. The first part of the process of making a blanket in this way is to make many squares. This is a labour of love that takes time. Eventually, each unique square is crocheted together with a single colour, weaving all the different parts together, and helping the blanket expand outward. Feminism, like crochet, is composed of different patterns, and different colours; it is important to remember that feminism has different entry points, and different threads that create its fabric.

This literature review amplifies my reading of a sample of literature that explores feminism, hooksian feminist theory, feminist pedagogy, and feminist practice in academia and high school ELA settings. While in graduate school, I became more curious about the possibilities that lay within bell hooks' work, how these possibilities might improve my practice, and how other educational practitioners had taken up her thinking. After focusing on a sample of hooks' books and interviews (2001, 2002, 2015a, 2015b, 2014; hooks and West, 2014; Mørck and Røgilds, 1998), and a broad search focussed on feminism and hooksian feminist theory, I narrowed my focus to feminist practice in educational settings, exploring feminist research and methodologies before locating literature that engaged with feminist practice in high schools and specifically, ELA classrooms. In this section, I highlight four threads I noticed and followed in my reading: 1. Sisterhood and Solidarity, 2. Subjectivity, 3. Resistance and Critique. 4. Empowerment. I view this chapter as a singular, and important action (hooks, 2015b; Lorde, 2007) and an opportunity to show you how I am thinking about this collective discourse on feminist pedagogy.

In this review, I sought out and included works by Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latina and queer scholars, not wanting to contribute to the problem of cis-gendered white women broadly claiming authority as experts and feminist knowledge keepers by ignoring diverse entry points to feminism (Maracle, 1988; hooks, 2015a; hooks, 2015b; Lorde, 2007; Reyes, Radina and Aronson, 2018). I did this because I recognize that my view "illuminates some things while endarkening others. It is narrow *and* unique" (Glaves, 2021). It is important that I am seeking out pedagogical stories that are stitched differently than my own. No overarching female experience

can be claimed (Weiler, 1991, p. 466), and this process reminds me of the many different stitches that make up feminism.

Feminism, Feminist Theory and Feminist Pedagogy: Clarifying Terms

Given the research focus for this review, it is important to clarify three key interconnected terms: feminism, feminist theory and feminist pedagogy. These three terms are woven together and understanding one term widens and strengthens one's understanding of the others.

Feminism

Due to her authority in and contributions to feminist scholarship, I use bell hooks' (2015a) work, who explains feminism as "a struggle to end sexist oppression [...] a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western Culture" (p. 26); she asserts that "at its most visionary, it will emerge from individuals who have knowledge of both margin and centre" (p. xiviii). hooks' work is a tapestry woven forward from Freire's (1970/2017) foundational idea that "radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates" (Freire, 1970/2017, p.11) and that the oppressed "too, 'know things' they have learned in their relations with the world" (p. 37). hooks (2015a) argues that for feminism to succeed, it must "unite theory and practice" (p. 114). Throughout hooks' works, she sees a lack of action and praxis as the true uphill climb in feminism, feminist theory, and feminist pedagogy informing her many calls to action.

Feminist Theory

While hooks (2015a) thinks about feminist theory as a mode of discussion, analysis and critique that "will always challenge, shake us up, provoke, shift our paradigms, change the way we think, turn us around" (p. xvi), the literature reveals many entry points to feminist theory shaped and informed by different factors, such as gender, sexuality, race, class, neurotypicality and (dis)ability. For this reason, many scholars like Carmen Luke (1996), refer instead to "feminisms" (p. 284) to acknowledge this diverse web. Across the literature different forms of feminist theory include but are not limited to, white bourgeois feminisms, womanisms, intersectional feminisms, Black feminisms, Indigenous feminisms and Chicana feminist theory. Each seems a response to feminisms before it, which may have omitted the specific oppressions of a group not yet included. Each new viewpoint weaves a new pathway toward a liberated existence for all of us.

Echoing hooks' insistence on praxis, many scholars practise feminism via their methodologies, demonstrating the various ways feminist research allows for the exploration that moves beyond 'traditional' or 'quantitative' approaches typically found within patriarchal/capitalist academe, and instead actively highlight nuance, emotion, grey areas, and affect via their methodologies. Feminist methodology challenges "binary thinking in western thought" (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p. 33). Pushing beyond the margins of what is accepted as "knowledge", especially in university spaces, scholars value affect, story, emotion, and art as forms of data.[3] Feminist scholars explore and operate within a space of curiosity and

[3] For a sample of research which seeks to interrupt boundaries in this way, please see Clandinin and Connelly, 2000;

unsteadiness, which Heilbrun (1999) determines is a "salient sign of liminality" (p. 3) a generative condition, a novel space "slightly forbidden, hard to categorize" (p. 9) but filled with potential and possibility.

Feminist Pedagogy

Shrewsbury (1993) defines feminist pedagogy as "a theory about the teaching/learning process that guides our choice of classroom practices" (p. 166). It is a "liberatory movement" [. . .], "a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia [. . .] engaged with the community [. . .] and with movements for social change" (p.166).

Feminist pedagogy frames educational processes as relational, reflective, critical, and evolving. "[R]ooted in the assumption that knowledge and critical thought done in the classroom should inform our habits of being and ways of living outside the classroom" (hooks, 2014, p. 193), hooks emphasizes that for feminist pedagogy to be transformative, it must eventually see its tendrils of thought spill out into the world beyond the classroom. While this may be ideal, Falk-Rafael et. al. (2004) critique studies that make these idealized claims, wary of studies that suggest women's studies and feminist classes empower students, the authors suggest that few prove it. The authors suggest more work is needed to prove that feminist pedagogy does lead to empowerment, and show the challenges that exist in quantifying this process by examining feminist practice in nursing programs. Feminist teaching, where teacher-student power relations

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Leggo, 2004, 2010, 2012; Cardinal, 2010; Lessard, 2015; Manning, 2015, 2016 a., 2016 b.; Clandinin et al., 2016; Ahmed, 2017; Springgay and Truman, 2017; Springgay, 2020; Loveless, 2019; Saleh, 2020; Truman, 2019; Caine et al., 2022.

are reimagined outside a hierarchical framing is a predominant theme that will be discussed later in the review.

Emergent Themes in the Literature

In the following section, I pull forward four different threads within the literature. Picture these threads like rows of looped crochet, distinct from, but interwoven with, each other. At times, the differences and sameness become muddled, and they overlap or hook into one another in the same way threads in a crocheted blanket do. It is the presence of each thread that builds the larger fabric of feminism. No thread is more important than another, all work together to strengthen feminism. The threads I discuss are subjectivity; sisterhood and solidarity; resistance and critique; and empowerment. Empowerment is subdivided in order to capture the complex ways empowerment has been conceptualized in the literature.

Thread 1:Subjectivity

Though I came to Simone de Beauvoir (1949/2010) later in my research, I feel it is important to begin this section acknowledging her role in illuminating the problem of subjectivity for women, pointing out that women's positionality in Western cultures was usually subordinate. Her observation that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (p. 283), is an important contribution to feminist thought, recognizing Western culture's positioning of men as holders of power, and women as objects who have power moving around them or enacted onto them. du Beauvoir's influence on feminist and anti-oppression scholarship is foundational and some of the first stitches in contemporary feminist thought; once this oppression was recognized

and named, scholars began to view individual experiences and stories as valuable tools in illuminating areas of concern.

Walker, Webb and Allen (2002) note the uniquely feminist pursuit of respecting the "diversity of human experience" (p. 70) and see the expression of emotion, story, feeling and affect as legitimate contributions to thinking and knowledge. Weiler (1991) provides an in-depth discussion on subjectivity, feeling and affect, acknowledging that "experience and feeling [...] are claimed as an "inner knowing""(Weiler, 1991, p. 463) that contain oppositional power especially when they counter what has been claimed by dominant society as true (p. 463). Following this, Shrewsbury (1997) explains that remaining "grounded in our experiences and maintaining the sense of ourselves as subject" (p. 166) frees us in our capacity to make space for the sharing and witnessing of each other's stories. Hartman (2005) explores the value of exposure to diverse female experiences, suggesting that without these, conceptualizations of gender and gender roles will be narrow. The subjectivities located in life and literature provide opportunities to engage in conversations about the contradictions, tensions and grey areas of gendered experience.

According to Lorde (2007), our stories must be recognized and felt because this is how we mobilize against systems of oppression and the removal of the self or singular story as a tool of oppression, especially for black and brown women. Lorde (2007) argues that these stories ignite the "transformation of silence into language and action [...and] self-revelation" (p. 42). In her recognition that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 2007, p. 123) she encourages women of colour to sharpen self-definition by "exposing the self in work and struggle" (Lorde, 2007, p. 123) which Maracle (1988) echoes, stating the "tide of

knowledge" carried within Black, Asian and Indigenous women is the key to "every Canadian's emancipation" (p.83).

Maracle's (1988) advocacy for subjectivity and critique of systems that do not allow space for difference highlights the underlying racism that permeates the erasure of difference: "You want me to consider myself, not Native, not Cree, not Salish, but a person, absent of nationality or racial heritage. All of us are just people, without differences. You fail to see your own hypocrisy [...] such sameness amounts to everyone else's obliteration but your own" (p.105). Maracle suggests that within crusades that beg for recognition of a human story, rather than a racial or cultural one, lies a real desire for homogeneity or sameness where there is none. It is the presence of self and the sharing of personal stories that challenge patriarchal, racist, or capitalist ways of being. Within the classroom and beyond it, including personal story and emotion, is reframed as resistance and action. In spaces that resist culture, difference, emotion, and personal story, there must be an unrelenting commitment to recognize subjectivity as a political act. It is in this nuanced personal story-telling that differences are given the space to exist, differences that highlight strengths and also tensions in dominant and often homogenous narratives. Recognizing the oppressive impact of race, culture, gender, class and sexuality on equality, coined "intersectionality" by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, was always and remains, for hooks, Lorde, and Maracle, at the core of feminist movements.

Thread 2: Sisterhood and Solidarity

Shrewsbury's (1997) description of the "web" of interrelationships "stretching to the local, regional and global communities" (Shrewsbury, 1997, p. 166) within feminisms is an apt

image capturing the paradox that exists within attempts to establish a sisterhood amongst diverse and unique people. A web is strong and reinforces, but also entangles and destroys. Across most of the works studied, both realities are evident. The image of webs calls to my metaphor of crochet, and I can see parallels between the two. It causes me to consider the threads woven within and around "Girlhood". I can see that the same way webs have the potential to both encourage and inhibit progress, crochet stitches, with their capacity to make beautiful things, can sometimes become entangled, making it difficult to progress and move forward until the knots are released. Some knots are easier to untie than others.

hooks (2015b) warns that sisterhood becomes opportunistic (p. 16) and "another shield against reality, another support system", (2015a, p. 46) for white women who "declared that sisters were to "unconditionally" love one another" (p. 46). Unfailing loyalty that requires the omission of critique allows white women to ignore their privilege and role in oppression, stalling feminist movements. hooks (2002) points out the dangers of this false sisterhood, noting that "we ask too much"(p. 244) if we demand unchecked allegiance. hooks also (2015a) delineates between support and solidarity; she is critical of demands for support that she sees as passive, and instead, advocates for sisterhood rooted in solidarity, which weaves and evolves, is active and strengthens our resistance to oppression (p. 46). Supportive sisterhood ignores the subjectivity and nuance of the female experience, whereas solidarity illuminates each voice's unique complaints and triumphs as acts that reinforce the movement, as seen in Nock's (2014) exploration of testimony and witnessing as these relate to the stories of Indigenous women and girls.

Lorde (2007) suggests we are better equipped to enrich ourselves via solidarity when we recognize "our future is predicated upon our ability to relate within equality [...] we must recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior" (p. 122). She insists on a sisterhood that demands the recognition of the "textures" (p. 118) of racialized or queer experiences and how these differ from heterosexual white female experiences. A hegemonic conceptualization of sisterhood that paints all women as the same must be resisted, whereas solidarity in the belief that we must work to end sexist (and all forms of) oppression unites us.[4] This "us" includes all genders and identifications, and is not exclusive.

If we can be wary and critical when monolith stories of feminism arise, while still being unified, hooks (2002) emphasizes the power of communion and solidarity amongst women. She celebrates a "woman-centred spirituality that honours the Earth, the interconnectedness of all life on the planet" (p. 230), which brings into focus the relational gifts that women carry inside them to nurture relationships. There is a real awakening that can occur through communion with other women, in the sharing of subjective stories, in the witnessing of others' ideas, and within discussions of truth. To aim for the truth, the real, and not edit these stories to please other people, to share in the pursuit of authentic love that doesn't oppress or dominate is ultimately what allows us to know, reflect and open ourselves to ourselves and the world (Kolbenschlag, as cited in hooks 2002, p. 230). Other women are vital, because they sustain us, and keep us whole. We seek out these connections because we need them to survive. Losing our social bonds with

[4] For more information about the psychological necessity of exposure to difference see Miller (1986).

other women is what takes us away from ourselves. Social bonds with other women are one of the first things we seek when we enter a new workplace, classroom, family, or new country (see Vigneau, 2022) and are vital to the survival of feminist movements.

Thread 3: Resistance and Critique

If we think of feminism as crocheted fabric, an important thread woven into feminism is that of resistance and critique. Without the tension created by both of these, no new strands of feminism can be woven in, no progress can be made. Weiler (1991) honours Paolo Freire's immense influence on feminist pedagogy, while at the same time proposing that feminist pedagogy's insistence on critique is a direct response to the gaps—specifically around assumptions he makes about those with and without power— in his work. Acknowledging that Friere is "without question the most influential theorist of critical or liberatory education" (p. 450), Weiler is critical of Freire, noting that some of Freire's ideals "do not address the subjectivity of people's lives" (Weiler, 1991, p. 450). He "never addresses the question of other forms of power held [...] by virtue of race, gender, or class" (p. 454), and therefore makes assumptions about experience, intention, and motivation. It is this absence of subjectivity in Freire's attempt to universalize oppression as a homogenous experience that is for Weiler, most problematic. The absence of, and attention to, subjectivity is what feminism responds to and demands of itself: that it both enriches and re-envisions what already is. It, for example, is what makes it possible for me to honour hooks' (2002) and Lorde's (2007) contributions to feminist thought, while also critiquing their failure to include the experiences of transgender women in their conceptualizations of communion and solidarity.

Resistance and critique are central to feminism, and Luke (1996) explores this through her critique of feminist pedagogy itself, arguing that "all feminisms, including feminist pedagogy, raise crucial epistemological and political questions about normativity, which in turn, call into question the theoretical validity and political agenda of feminism's 'truth claims'" (p. 284). While Luke celebrates the critical nature of feminism because it demands unrelenting critique even of itself, she also points out that this critique creates many paradoxes for feminism, most notably around the discussion of authority. According to Luke (1996), "feminist pedagogy refuses hierarchies of power and authority" (p. 294), however, a feminist teacher also relies on her expertise and authority to "change, convince and enliven her students" (p. 295). Luke points out a clear tension and murkiness not yet solved: "its anti-foundational stance and commitment to contingent identities and knowledge, and [...] its political and theoretical mission of critique and transformation" (p. 295) continue to butt up against educative systems built on hierarchical conceptualizations of power.

Maracle (1988) observes that schools "have shown themselves to be ideological processing plants [filling students…] from cover to cover with the ideological non-sense of European culture" (p.113). Addressing the failure of Canadian schools, she warns that a "sprinkling" (p. 114) of diverse culture into an unmoving, already existing, oppressive educational system is "offensive" (p.114), performative, and will enact no real change. For Maracle, superficial diversification of schools is simply a re-patterning—that is, while it may use a different coloured thread, the pattern with which it is crocheted is the same, and yields the same results. Decolonization, in the way that Maracle envisions it, must be repatriated "by Native people themselves" (p. 118). Her analysis opens up thinking about systemic oppression, and how

it continually limits true transformation and activism, making its transformative power finite. The reimagined education system Maracle envisions is completely removed from the existing structure of education.

Reyes, Radina and Aronson (2018) are critical of "culturally and linguistically diverse" (p. 2) classrooms being taught by predominantly "white middle-class and mono-lingual women" (p. 2) as problematic "cultural mismatches" (p. 2). Duque's (2017) interview with Mallinson and Hudley, attempts to tackle similar concerns about the way that white female teachers are overly represented in schools by exploring the benefits of strategies that would help those teachers navigate and adapt to a diverse student body. They suggest that educators need to become more skilled at recognizing the racial, linguistic, cultural, and gender biases that permeate academic school systems in high schools and post-secondary spaces. Critical of gendered, racial, and cultural biases that expose themselves in language, they promote feminist awareness around the ways that linguistics and language are closely tied to Social Justice, echoing Bruce et al. (2008) who emphasize that the systemic erasure of certain stories and vernacular in classrooms cannot be ignored. In Duque (2017), Mallinson and Hudley advocate for the use of social media tools to educate teachers.

Social media and internet spaces have stitched in a new realm of feminism, and Elwell and Buchanan (2021) highlight "backlash culture" that can arise when the internet zeitgeist is antagonistic to feminist movements (CNN, 2021; Ewens, 2021). Adair (2021) explores this reality, but within a higher-education context, examining the microaggressions that exist in the higher-education context in a zeitgeist that is alt-right and in the age of Donald Trump (p. 48). She writes about the nuance of teaching radical courses in hierarchical institutions (p. 47) and

reveals the difficulties that can arise for feminist and gender studies professors in a political climate that may resist conversations around equity diversity and inclusion. She explores the idea that "universities and colleges become important venues for disseminating intersectionality" (p. 50). It is difficult to engage wholly in this work because these institutions remain a paradoxical space (p. 48), where professors may be pressured to accommodate students who push conversations of far-right and, at times, racist or misogynist views under the veil of critical dialogue.

Thread 4: Empowerment

Empowerment in the Classroom

Paolo Friere (1970/2017) challenges hierarchical structures that position one person or group as all-knowing, especially in classrooms, wherein a teacher who claims to know everything, pours knowledge into the minds of passive students. He sees this "depositing" (p. 45) of knowledge as destructive to not only students' creativity, but also their humanity and authenticity. Subordinating students as passive receptors renders change impossible. Feminist literature continues this interrogation of the complex paradox that exists within every school — fighting against oppression in classroom spaces which are built on limited patriarchal and capitalist conceptualizations of power. In an interview with Mørck and Røgilds (1998), bell hooks emphasizes that these paradoxes need to be addressed explicitly within students' formal education; inviting students to engage and interrogate these tensions that exist in educational institutions is a form of praxis. hooks is consistent in her belief that feminist pedagogy must always "consciously explore [. . . the] underlying system shaping thought and practice" (hooks,

2015b, p. 19) to eventually create a more egalitarian structure to foster an empowered learning environment. Rejecting the “powerful’s definition of their reality” (hooks, 2015a, p. 92) is one way all of us, students and teachers, can reimagine the way we think about power and re-envision our classrooms.

Specia and Osman (2015) state that “the academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility” (p. 196). Establishing a classroom that is comprised of people who are “connected and who care about each other’s learning as well as their own" (Shrewsbury, 1993, p. 166) looks and operates differently than a room where people are isolated and contained as either bestower or absorber of knowledge. Changing the status quo will require a rethinking of this dynamic, imagining a space where dialogue and exchanges of knowledge among “multiple authorities” are fostered (Walker, Webb, Allen, 2002, p. 70).

hooks (2001) observes the ways “silence and obedience to authority [are] most rewarded” (p.178) in patriarchal and capitalist systems. For hooks, class is deeper than currency; it seeps into our consciousness and teaches us about place and relationality in a different way, determining “values, standpoint and interests” (p. 182). Recognizing how middle-class norms impact our sense of self, and the operation of classrooms, (p. 185) is vital. A central focus of my teachers’ college experience focussed on behaviour management and strategies that would generate “good” behaviour, and later, my teacher evaluations explicitly considered classroom “control”. In this paradigm, silence indicates hard work and engaged learning: “white collar work” (stagnant, in a chair, cerebral) is celebrated, while “blue colour work” in factories and out-of-doors (active, of the body, physical) is frowned upon. According to hooks, students must be

empowered to consider, interrogate, and challenge these embodied class separations. hooks recognizes new perspectives that would be offered by the presence of more working-class people in the academy, alongside how movement—blue-collar physicality—would "subvert and challenge the existing structure" (p.183), as well. The moving body of a teacher disrupts the picture of an educator as stationary behind a podium, omnipotent, all-knowing and upper class (p.138) especially when this movement flows alongside the movement of students and classroom spaces. Empowering teachers, students, and learning spaces to become mobile creates excitement and buzzing (p. 148) that is reciprocal and relational. I think of this movement as an agitation that can, over time, wear down old inequitable barriers that exist in these patriarchal and capitalist systems. These agitations can make space for "communit[ies] of learners together" (p. 153) where all voices are empowered to engage in the "sustained conversation" (p. 146) that makes feminist change possible. Scholars like Blake (2021) Fearon, (2018) Roy and Schen (1993) and Shrewsbury (1997) identify activities that empower students to engage in relational and dynamic activities, like co-editing, dialogue, group assessments and grading, not as simple collaborative tasks, but as rich opportunities for repositioning students as dynamic, capable agents of change.

Empowerment Through, and as, Creative Expression

Recognizing creativity's potential to energize and "increase the power of all actors, not to limit the power of some" (Shrewsbury, 1997, p. 168) aligns with Lorde (2007), who asserts that what is most important to each individual "must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised and misunderstood" (p. 40). She suggests creative expression is vital.

For hooks (2001; 2014), emotion is an expression of creativity, and a vital piece of the tapestry of our lives, that when woven together, empowers us. hooks (2014) critiques the idea that emotion is often minimized as only emotion, devalued and subordinated, especially in academic spaces. The skepticism surrounding emotion is, for hooks, a way to refuse the presence and ways of knowing of women, diverse races and diverse cultures. Emotionlessness is an idealized aim that refuses emotion's legitimacy. It is a "form of denial" (p. 155) that "refuses to let the whole body and soul of a person in" (p.155). A system that engages only the mind is incomplete; hooks highlights the activist potential of allowing in our whole selves. She acknowledges that emotion means opening oneself to uncertainty, but points out that within this uncertainty lies the potential for possibility, resistance, and change.[5]

hooks and Cornel West (2014) consider the way emotion, spirituality and soul seem to be regarded by academia as antithetical to academia and consider how black prophetic spirituality operates within a neo-liberal regime. hooks states in her open dialogue with West, that this regime "is choking our spiritual traditions to death". Both hooks and West reveal the ways that systemic oppression can occur by omitting and suppressing cultural practices and the creative expression of these practices. Creating boundaries around theoretical or academic spaces, ones that omit these inner knowings that speak to one's soul from entering, is another way that institutions prevent progress and narrow the margins of what will be permitted in those spaces. If

[5] For more reading on feminist willingness to engage with emotion's generative potential, see: Manning, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Springay and Truman, 2017; fidyk, 2019; Loveless, 2019; Truman, 2019.

love, soul, and spirituality and the expression of these are vital for survival, the omission of these can be regarded as a type of death of particular ways of knowing and being.

Flint et. al. (2022) explore themes of ethics and oppression while interrogating what might happen if academic, and educational spaces broadened what they value as knowledge to include varied modes of creative expression. Borrowing from Ahmed's (2017) idea of speaking women and people into existence (p. 4), they consider at length Ahmed's ideas around "homework" or feminist praxis that exists first in home-places and is then carried into school; they suggest this widening is what will empower all people, invite them to engage in feminist work, and spin new futures (Flint et. al., 2022, p.130). This thread in the literature, which illuminates the ways women are already living, creating and expressing a feminist life, traces back to Freire's (2017) foundational observation that the oppressed "too, 'know things' (p.37).

Empowerment as Action.

Madeleine Grumet (2006) warns of the potential stagnancy of a "language of complaint [...which] drills downward [...] digging our prison deeper and deeper" (p. 49). Using the wilderness as a metaphor for an uncharted space, a future imagined, she suggests that for praxis to occur, we must begin to step into the wilderness (Grumet, 2006) enacting our dreams. Without this enactment, we risk being "revolutionaries in the abstract, not in our daily lives" (Antonio Faundez, as cited in hooks, 2014, p. 48).

Jimenez is a scholar who takes up this feminist call for action most explicitly, providing tangible examples of this praxis as experienced by her students at a prestigious private school in Manhattan. Understanding empowerment to mean the encouragement of reading, writing and

production of stories to be shared and stretched beyond the classroom into communities, via actions like protests, assemblies, speeches, blogs, tweets and rallies, for Jimenez (2016), listening to and following students' lead is key (p. 96). Also crucial is providing resources to carry out real-world actions, and that teachers must be engaged in the movement(s) too (Jimenez, 2016, p. 93), thereby living "what we affirm" (hooks, 2014, p. 48).

Jimenez insists that students' writing be produced in online spaces where other students, in the class and beyond, have access to the subjective ponderings found there (Troutman & Jimenez, 2016) and I take from her work the notion that visibility is paramount to her beliefs. Visibility draws attention to diverse stories, evoking new sections of webbing to be cast out, connecting other stories that may exist, and enabling other students to contribute to a much larger discourse, enabling people who may have been on the margin, to move to the centre (hooks, 2015a, p. 27). The very acts of writing, speaking and having students hear each other help illuminate the powers held by them already (hooks, 2015a, p. 95). A feminist teacher must see that this kind of "commitment to engaged pedagogy is an expression of political activism" (hooks, teaching to transgress, p. 203), which provides students with communal experiences that promote activism rather than apathy.

Conclusion to the literature review: Joining the Conversation

Reviewing the literature invited me to join an ongoing conversation; however, it didn't feel like that in the beginning. When I began reading for this chapter, I was intimidated, having heard many of my classmates change their tone and intonation when they began to speak about

"*Literature Review*" chapters: "*Have you begun your literature review?"; "My supervisor told me I needed to add another 25 articles to my literature review"; "You better start reading now for your literature review if you want to finish now before your kids are grown*". It felt like a herculean task to begin, so I started it with the author who made me feel most welcome, and that was bell hooks. I had only read one of her books before beginning graduate school, and it felt like a good time to continue to read more of her work. As I read her books, in the beginning, I only listened, knowing I was taking in important information and building my own foundational understanding. I wrote pages and pages of notes recording the ideas that lifted up for me. hooks' work led me to reading Audre Lorde, and while I continued to listen, I also noticed the way their work called to each other, and was in conversation with each other. As I continued to follow the different tendrils of thread from their works to other scholars, I could see that these works were all humming along in conversation together, linking back and forth to each other, responding to, challenging and evolving from, each other. When I look back at my black notebooks from this time, I see that I was beginning to take notes differently and write more. I was asking questions and had many wonders. I was beginning to see the ways that these ideas and loops were connected and the ways that "Girlhood" and my approach to feminism and pedagogy fit. I began to feel more comfortable with what I was reading and that I belonged in the conversation and did have something to add.

Reading Lee Maracle agitated this comfort at just the right moment. When I was beginning to understand feminism as one thing, Maracle pulled threads that I had ignored or couldn't see and she showed me it was something different. With Maracle I went back to listening for a while. Maracle helped me stop telling one story and asked me to consider another:

she taught me that feminism is composed of many different parts, and stitched together by one idea. This unifying thread is strong *and* delicate; it can unify, but it can break or come undone. Maracle illuminated issues that unravel feminism, ones that I was not aware of before reading her work. It was really important for me, because her work pushed me to reexamine the loops I had already begun to stitch.

When I found Jimenez's work, it ignited a conversation around the practical application of the many theoretical ideas covered by other scholars, especially bell hooks. Jimenez's engaging students in feminist praxis and activism earlier in their formal schooling is inspiring; she made me think about feminist praxis differently, and I began to consider the ways her ideas were in relation with my own. I found myself talking with Jimenez in my notes, noticing the ways Jimenez's work and "Girlhood" explore opportunities for collaborative and active feminism woven into secondary schools (and earlier), "reaching beyond the academic and even the written word" (hooks, 2015b, p. 23). My literature review helped me recognize that my research is my way of putting a tentative hand up, knowing I have something to offer to the conversation, by inquiring into the experiences of two participants and myself in feminist ELA courses in public high schools.

Chapter Three: Stories of "Girlhood": Research Design for a Narrative Inquiry into a Feminist ELA Course

People live their stories as much as they tell them in words. They live them in what they do not say. They live them in attending to the words of others rather than their own. They live them in the gaze that comes with inward thought and inward talk while others are conversing. They live them in the feelings that come to surround them, that they give off in sighs and looks and gestures, or simply in the feeling that their presence evokes in others. All of these are forms of telling, though without words, and they are forms of telling that we can begin to read and hear through and also without words. I am coming to believe that the telling of a story, however it occurs, is part of the living of a life and that to shut a story down is to shut down, as well, the life of which it tells and from which it flows.

(Neumann, 1997, p.107-108)

Stories From Where I Stand

Our stories are who we are and how we know. We live stories and sometimes tell them in words, actions, expressions, gestures, movement, and art-making. In living, telling, reliving, and retelling our stories we create our stories to live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These stories of experience are impermanent, always shifting and evolving, always with the potential of becoming otherwise; they are how we live but also how we understand ourselves, our families and our cultures. Stories of experience move. They move across time and place and people, and each time they are relived or retold, the tellers and listeners pull the threads of old stories and restitch them into a more current, a more "for now", understanding of them.

When my grandma sat with me and taught me how to make my first stitches of chain crochet, she told stories about being the second oldest of eight children on a farm, and as she did, she showed me the way she understood the story of her life. She described her jobs on the farm and the responsibilities she took on as the oldest girl, moving out at thirteen to work and provide

for her family. I heard things and felt things as she spoke, about the complexities of her life, and the deeply felt responsibility she carried through her childhood; she never complained, but the words she chose, the looks on her face, and the silences around these stories held meaning too. As she told these stories, she shaped an understanding of her own identity, her past, her life; as she told these stories, I began shaping an understanding of my own identity, and how it had been shaped and formed by not only these experiences, but in the stories told about them. I situate myself in relation to them here for you, so that you will have a sense of not only who I am, but a past that reaches past my life, while still existing here, in the present.

Hearing and telling stories requires openness and curiosity, not a quest for absolute certainty. Stories contain truths that echo or call to people in rich, unique, evolving ways. The meaning of a narrative is uniquely influenced by the creative energy in and around the giver and receiver of the story, contributing to how he or she or they will understand it. My feminist perspective recognizes and values that the particularities (Clandinin, et al. 2016) of individual bodies, words, silences, feelings, looks, gestures, sounds, and places are not only locations where stories live, but creative forces that impact how stories are lived, told and received. All of these localities speak to the larger social, cultural and institutional narratives that shape us as well. All of these hold distinct values, none more important than another, all of these together help us know.

I have been writing stories down since first receiving a diary when I was seven years old. I wrote down stories of my life, recording them for an imaginary reader: a future self who would one day want to remember, or a grandchild who might one day want to know. I sometimes wrote fictional stories, veiling the characters under creative names and places, always secretly

imagining the centre of the story as myself. I was also interested in my family stories, often visiting my grandmothers and listening as they shared theirs with me; I asked them questions, and recorded their answers on tapes and in notebooks, seeing them as the precious entities they were and knowing that the stories had and would continue to shape me, rippling forward through my life. Listening to these stories was making me who I was.

I continued writing stories of my experiences into my adulthood, each time creating a story of who I was. As I wrote, I was also reading other women's stories alongside them. Despite this commitment to story, I did not claim this love of narrative until graduate school because I did not feel confident doing so, having always been taught to minimize what was seen too often from within the dominant narratives as subjectivity in both school and work. When I look back over my life and over my graduate school experience, I can see why Narrative Inquiry (NI) became the way I conceptualized my research. In this section, I explore the story that led me to NI, describing my first encounter with NI and the ways it guides my understanding of its design and purpose. I explore the ways I see NI connecting to Feminism, before concluding with my research design.

Finding Narrative Inquiry

David Lewkowich's Research-Creation (R-C) class was an important experience for me, and I can see the ways that it led me to ultimately choose NI as my mode of inquiry for this Master's thesis. In a strange virtual classroom reality, where peers' faces were framed by pixelated boxes as they sat in their respective homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was introduced to R-C as a mode of inquiry. After swimming through a sea of courses that sat within traditional and ordered paradigms of what research papers should look and sound like, Dr.

Lewkowich showed me there were other pathways forward. Instilled with a willingness to dance in a middle place of inquiry and experience, scholars like Natalie Loveless (2019), Erin Manning (2015; 2016a; 2016b), Jordan Abel (2019), Springgay and Truman (2017) and Truman et al. (2019), widened the margins of what I understood research to be. Each piece I read impacted me deeply, opening my eyes to the possibilities of the different ways researchers could, through creative inquiry, find data that glows (Springgay and Truman, 2017) and widen what they knew.

It was through an exploration of R-C that I began to see the importance of researchers entering the middle space that exists between knowing and that which is yet unknown. It has shown me that research rooted in genuine inquiry, curiosity, experimentation, and creation is something that can generate knowledge and growth. I found myself drawn to other qualitative approaches that used story to explore this middle place, and it was here that I began to see NI's generative potential. I had read some of Dr. Jean Clandinin's (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and Dr. Lessard's (2015) work earlier in grad school and had been moved by hearing Dr. Lessard share his stories (2021) in person, but it was not until I had taken Dr. Lewkowich's course, that I understood the way NI aligned with how I was thinking about learning as something ever-expanding and ever-evolving (Davis and Sumara, 2000). Narrative Inquiry helped me understand more deeply my own relationships to story, and why throughout my life I had valued it so much:

> Human beings have lived out and told stories about living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long. These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities. (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, p.35)

Narrative Inquiry helped me understand research and learning as something relational, something infinite, capable of growth and reaching outward while maintaining and honouring pathways

inward. I understand NI as something that evolves and moves across time, places, and relationships; it recognizes the threads tying experiences together and the way these are woven and unwoven, inward and outward, like loops of crochet. Narrative Inquiry's view of experience means that it focuses "not only on individuals' experience, but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, p.42-43). Narrative inquirers look into an individual's experience in the world, an experience that is "storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside another, and writing, and interpreting texts" (p.43).

Narrative inquiry helped me think more deeply about the telling and retelling of story and reframed how I saw and understood stories in my own life:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

This idea of story-as-portal resonated with me deeply. Viewing a story as a portal into experience, oneself, relationships, and place helped me begin to see stories —like my crochet stories with my grandma —as what was creating meaning in my life.

Led by R-C and by my curiosity, I decided to enrol in my supervisor, Dr. Lessard's, Narrative Inquiry course, and it was here that I developed the confidence and language to claim how I saw knowledge and knowing as inextricably linked to story. I valued NI's acknowledgement that its research provides a glimpse into experience already in the midst,

already in the making (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000) and does not claim that its findings will highlight absolute truths but instead offer an "experience of the experience" (Caine et al., 2022, p. 13). NI recognizes educators' interest in life (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.xxii) and invites educator-researchers to seek "ways of enriching and transforming [experience] for themselves and others" (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, p.42). This enrichment is made possible through understanding stories as portals to different worlds: inquirers, participants and readers engage in a form of "world-travelling" (Lugones, 1987, p. 8). Travelling into someone else's experience means entering a portal that leads us to their perspective, and which ensures that we are no longer excluded or separate from them. Lugones suggests that travelling into another's world is an experience we can go into lovingly or arrogantly; she emphasizes that to enter a world without agenda or desire for personal gain but instead with a willingness to travel playfully and without judgement, is where the potential for learning and forward progress lays.

World-travelling is an uncertain journey, and one that requires openness "to surprise" (Lugones, 1987, p.16). In the same way, to engage with NI means a willingness to accept "not being seen as competent, to not knowing, to the surprise of what might be possible" (Caine et al., 2022, p. 210). NI requires vulnerability and wonder. To seek what you don't know, and to admit you don't know requires a certain level of courage because of the infinite possibilities of what you might be shown. NI reaches beyond borders and recognizes ineffable generative forces in feeling, time, nature, place, and relationships. It sees stories as "portals, as gateways of the temporality of being in the midst, neither in one time nor another, neither in one place or social relations or another" (Caine et al., 2022, p. 233), and steeped with possibility.

The potential of this type of research working for my inquiry became clearer to me one evening after reading a piece Dr. Lessard had written about an oak tree (Clandinin et al., 2016, p.44). His story shifted the way I viewed my research questions about Feminist ELA courses in high school. In one of our Weekly Dialogue assignments in 2022, I responded directly to Dr. Lessard about this and what it awakened in me:

> *When you wrote with such love about your dad, it made my chest fill up with warmth and fullness in my heart because I recognize that respect and love and have known it in my own life. It is interesting that in reading your inquiry, it created an experience for me, which is something Clandinin and Connelly (2000) talk about. What brought the stories forward for me specifically was the detail you included about visiting the oak tree at your family's farm because I have a tree back home. Mine is a maple tree.*
>
> *My dad planted it in our backyard when I was little using a sapling from an enormous, looming tree that shaded his parent's backyard, and was planted there by his dad. My grandfather had planted saplings on his property in Brantford after taking them from the forest surrounding Great Uncle Gordon's farm near Sarnia. We called my tree Mel's tree. There is a picture of me standing in front of that tree when I was little, smiling, and proud because I believed it was mine.*
> *When I moved away for university many years later, my dad gave me a gift. It was a piece of one of the branches of the tree that he had cut off and hollowed out into a perfect circle; inside this little hole he had placed pictures of the people in my family, their faces painstakingly cut out into circles, so that they fit perfectly. It brings tears to my eyes now as I write this, thinking of him hollowing out the branch and the care it must have taken. To anyone else, it looks like a piece of a tree branch sitting on my dresser in my bedroom. But to me, it is so special and I brought it here with me to Alberta when I moved here from Ontario.*
>
> *I hadn't really thought about how much this tree connects me to my dad until reading your story. I'm thinking about the hot summer nights sitting under that tree that now looms over my parent's house, giving us a break from the sweltering Ontario heat, and the sounds it makes when the wind passes through it-one of my favourite sounds. We sit and drink tea under its shade, and talk and laugh or just read or sit in silence. I'm thinking about the bright red leaf I got in an envelope one day after my daughter, Poppy, was born, no letter, just a leaf, but with my*

> *dad's writing, in all caps, addressed to me. I framed that leaf and it hangs in my house, reminding me of him, reminding me of home. I am thinking about that tree in my life and how it connects me to places, things and people in the past, present and future stretching out in all directions.*

Dr. Lessard's story invited me onto a new pathway, one that allowed me to consider the way hearing or reading someone's story can evoke or illuminate stories within us, stories that blur and blend time, places, and relationships. It made me think about the layers of stories that are carried by all of us and how the connections in these crocheted stories are infinite and "unfolding" (Caine et al., 2013, p. 265). It made me think of my "Girlhood" classes and the infinite stories carried into them each day by all of us who entered. I had never really considered this phenomenon in quite this way. Seeing NI as both "phenomenon and methodology" (Clandinin, 2019, p. 265) rooted in the belief that stories are both under study and how we study them, helped highlight the interconnected relationship between stories and our lives and how we live not separate from, but within stratified landscapes of story (Silko,1996).

Stories as woven artistry

I found that the metaphor of stratified earth helped "make visible the nested nature of stories lived and told" (Clandinin et al. 2016, p. 110). I began to think about stories out in the open, like the ones that run on the edge of an escarpment, and also stories we don't see, the ones hidden inside stones at the bottom of a river. It made me think about the stories within family and school landscapes, those visible and those hidden. The stories that are known and shared within a family, passed down or whispered about, some that are silenced, or others that erupt refusing to be contained. This idea of stratified layers made me think about all of the stories crocheted in

into our lives and the ways that the stitches before impact the stitches that come next. Telling and retelling story recognizes the “practice and artistry of lives lived” (Caine et al., 2013, p. 267) and how we are continually “composed and re-composed” (p. 266) through the stories that live in us and swirl around us. Stories have a presence; they are a force of generative creativity that exist in all stories, even in academic ones.

Working with Dr. Lessard has taught me about the embodiment of stories and the way that they are continually experienced, created, and re-created by us; they live in us, evolve in us, and are carried into all spaces we enter, including into our classrooms. It was Dr. Lessard who introduced me to Clandinin & Connelly (2000), who then introduced me to Dewey's (1938) suggestion that education and life cannot be separated; this idea that awoke something in myself, something I knew to be true, and something that I felt the “Girlhood” course recognized. The idea that classrooms contain infinite stories of the students, teachers, families and cultures interwoven together caught my attention because of the way it challenged the boundaries that are sometimes set in schools between time, places, and people. It was this type of thinking that caused me to consider using NI as a framework for my research.

NI recognizes experience as a continual “living alongside" (Clandinin et al. 2016, p. 110). I knew that if I wanted to study experiences in the “Girlhood” course, I needed to include my experiences—experiences that are inextricably interwoven with the students, colleagues, families and places connected to the course—in my research. The very nature of “Girlhood”, a course that is feminist and rooted in ideas of relationality and evolving critique, seemed to align with NI’s willingness to envision research done in solidarity with participants and to question

and push against boundaries, institutional frameworks and practices that need to be resisted, questioned or changed (Clandinin et al., 2016; Lessard, 2015).

Textures, patterns, and feminism within Narrative Inquiry

Textures

For the first time in graduate school, I began seeking readings beyond the required texts on a course syllabus. I searched for examples of NI and found myself reading whatever I could find in the quiet evenings after my son and daughter had gone to bed. I began with Lessard (2010, 2014), wanting to see how he had pulled his narratives together, to see how he had taken his own experiences and those of the youth he walked alongside in his research to present a cohesive narrative account. I was drawn into the ways he wove together research that valued relationships, memory, home and school places especially as they related to experiences for Indigenous youth. The experience of reading these works transported me into an experience of my own; the stories of the research participants began to awaken something inside of me. I felt enlivened by the research and noticed that his work was different than anything else I had read.

Shawn Wilson's (2008) exploration of Indigenous knowledge systems and research helped me notice the unique textures in Lessard's work (2010, 2014, 2021). It illuminated the way Lessard centres relationships instead of minimizing them, as well as the unique way he tells his stories. The distinct texture of Lessard's narratives is created by the unique cadence in his writing, but also by his deliberate honouring of relationships that impact the story. In each piece he writes, he gives attention to the web of relationships that exist within the story, around the

story, and beyond the story. He attends to the connections with family, friends, teachers, elders, loved ones and place —both participants' and his own—braided into an already unfolding narrative. His work and approach to research reveal the beauty, respect, care, humility, ethical relationality and accountability interwoven into Indigenous knowledge systems.

Recognizing that Lessard's research uses NI within an Indigenous research paradigm helps me think about and understand the differences I noticed in the NI studies I read. For example, my conversations with Dr. Lessard have revealed a deep and important bond between him and mentor, Dr. Jean Clandinin. Despite their close relationship, differences exist in their work because their life experiences are different. In their research, they are also under study and as they study themselves in relation to participants, they have a profound impact on the textures of the study itself. Lessard's experience leads his inquiry in new directions, but despite these differences, the conceptualization of NI remains constant. As the stories are told and retold, I can see that while the *ways* they are told are unique, the process of inquiry is what links them together. Noticing this caused me to begin to consider my own responsibilities as someone engaging in a feminist and relational form of inquiry. I began to understand that my stories will be different because my unique experience impacts how I interact with participants and move with and alongside them; however, my work will be connected with theirs because engaging with NI means that I too will be studying storied experience.

Patterns

I continued reading and began noticing that NI was a mode of research favoured by many diverse women (Chung, 2009; Cardinal, 2010; Menon, 2014; Swanson, 2013; Saleh et al., 2014; Saleh, 2017; Saleh et al., 2018; Vigneau, 2022; Glanfield, 2003). I began to think more seriously

about what pulled them and me toward this form of narrative inquiry; central to this was my noticing that NI invited freedom to engage with personal stories and creative expression. As I considered their work, I noted that their research was feminist in the way that it did not drill down into a language of despair (Grumet, 2006) but instead valued the subjective experiences visited within them. Room was still made in the stories to consider tensions and chafe points (Weiler, 1991, p. 466) and draw focus to areas that needed critique or deeper attention. These works centred personal, family and homeplace stories and in doing so, removed them from a marginalized positioning: there were stories about grandmothers and mothers, there were stories about Indigenous identity and Indigenous women and girls, there were stories about Syria, stories about names, stories about female connections, stories about arriving in Canada for the first time, stories about race, class, language and culture. Despite being published in education journals or as Master's or Doctoral theses in faculties of education, they made room for subjectivity, personal story and home places in the institution of education and I saw these patterns of boundary-pushing as inherently feminist.

Feminism

Feminism is embedded within NI. Narrative inquirers follow pathways inward, following threads to stories and intuitive ways of knowing while also relying on growth and connection outward. It is this simultaneous flow between subjectivity and relationality, as well as the attention given to the nuance created by places and time that resonated with my research into feminist pedagogy. Narrative inquirers use stories to study experiences and understand that this kind of inquiry can be transformative (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). I began to see its transformative power more clearly in my NI class with Dr. Lessard. It was a class full of women

who were strong, intelligent, and funny; it buzzed and felt entirely different than any other class I experienced in graduate school. The class felt comfortable and relaxed. People in this class brought food to share, and sometimes their children when childcare fell through. The class did not feel institutional; it moved (hooks, 2014) and we moved within it. This movement made room for creativity; it made room for critical exchange; it made room for transformation.

One evening, a classmate and friend, Megan (personal communication, 2022), observed that NI's valuing of stories was something Indigenous peoples had been doing for thousands of years already. She talked about the ways her family relations, elders in her community and ancestors had always celebrated narrative in this way. She critiqued and interrogated NI as a methodology, and invited us to see story and inquiry into story as something that Indigenous peoples had been doing for thousands of years and had always valued. Her words made me rethink the lineage of NI as something that reached farther back than feminist thinkers, than Clandinin and Connelly or Dewey, and into cultures and communities that had existed long before academic institutions were willing to consider subjective experience in this way. While Clandinin and Connelly worked to ensure that NI was accepted in university spaces, this reliance on story as a form of knowledge-making had existed for thousands of years before this.

After class that night, it struck me that this interrogation into NI invited us all to engage in feminist critique. Megan's critique pushed me to reconsider, refine and evolve my understanding of NI. It caused me to read more and understand that NI *did* acknowledge that story as a way of creating meaning wasn't new; instead, NI recognized that "what feels new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in the field of social science research (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, p.35). In my meetings with Dr. Clandinin and Dr. Lessard, months after that night

in class, I was able to ask questions about this. My conversations with them helped strengthen my understanding of what NI is, what it does, and what it claims to do in university spaces. These conversations helped me gain confidence in my understanding of NI as a research approach to which I felt drawn. Megan's stories helped transform and deepen my understanding of NI. I had heard Dr. Lessard talk about this type of exchange before: he described it as looking into tensions or looking into stories that bump against each other (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). bell hooks (2015a, 2015b) thinks about this as a critique, and as something that needs to be welcomed and encouraged because of its transformative capacity. This class, and the NI we engaged within the class, affirmed that these tensions held stories and meaning that were worthy of inquiring into. I share this story with you, hoping that it illustrates the way I experienced NI as a study that honoured feminist belief systems and made sense for my own research.

On the last night of our class, we began to share the autobiographical narratives we had been working on. The witnessing went well beyond the time allotted for class, yet all of us stayed to hear our classmates read their stories. Many of us wept as we listened to these narratives. I wept because in these stories I heard stories of myself, stories that I was encountering for the first time, stories I could only partially know and stories I could never understand. Hearing these stories changed and created new meaning in my own stories. I could feel that thing in the room, that feeling that moves through you when you hear a story and you feel the presence of what it contains, a presence beyond even words. There was an intimacy to this experience that was created by the vulnerability and solidarity woven into it. As we laid our stories alongside each others', this became an experience that shifted and created meaning in our

own lived experience. The stories were unique and yet connected: a blanket of crocheted granny squares woven within the room.

To be in a space that invited us to share in this way, to hear these kinds of stories in a room within a university, a space where the narratives were allowed to expand, to flow through us, carried forward, beautiful and important. This course had shown me the infinite nature of stories, and what might be gained by respecting the storyteller, the story's characters, its structure, and its events; it taught me about what might be gained by respecting those who witness the story and the reality that all parties in this process impact the story told and are always a part of the process of carrying story forward. It reminded me of what bell hooks had written about feminist spaces in schools; it showed me solidarity enacted; it helped me imagine how I wanted the research I engaged in to look and feel.

My Research Approach: From field to field texts to research texts as narrative accounts

Beginnings

Over the past eight years, former "Girlhood" students have sporadically stayed in touch through email the way students sometimes do, giving me updates on their lives, asking questions, or needing reference letters. In order to find participants for the study, I sent out a general email to those former students because this was the group I had contact information for, and let them know that I was engaging with a study on the "Girlhood" course. I invited them to contact me over email if they were interested in learning more about the research. Using a general email to provide an initial overview of the research helped ensure that students did not feel compelled to participate or even respond. Alison and Maria were the first two respondents. They had taken the

course in different years, which was something I had hoped for. I sent them both a General Information Letter outlining the intention of my study and invited them to contact me via email, phone or text, so that I could explain the study in more detail and answer any questions he/she/they may have. Please see Appendix B and C for the General Information Letter and Participant Consent Form.

Research Conversations and Narrative Threads

I met with Alison and Maria separately. One-on-one, we began our research together, talking about their experiences leading up to the "Girlhood" course, their experiences within the course, and their stories of how the course impacted them beyond the time they were students in it. The length of the conversations varied as a result of their availability and what Alison and Maria wanted to discuss. Both in-person and virtual conversations were recorded on my phone and these recordings were transcribed.

To generate, inspire and guide our conversations Alison, Maria and I composed field notes, text messages, emails, timelines, artifacts, photos, reflection journals, writing and work samples to guide our conversations. Some of these were incorporated into a final narrative account for each participant. In keeping with the relational and conversational nature of the inquiry, I did not use formal interview questions, instead inviting conversation to unfold around the following wonders: *What compelled you to freely enrol in such a course? What are your stories of the course? In what ways did a secondary school Feminist English Language Arts course impact you within and beyond the course?*

During and after our meetings, each participant and I began to co-create interim texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which aimed to represent each participant's experiences of the

course. These were inspired by the wonders outlined above as well as bits of writing, pictures and timelines we shared during our discussions. As interim texts were developed and shared in our conversations as well as over email, changes or revisions to the interim texts were ongoing and collaborative. We gradually shaped a written version of the story of their experiences in a narrative account (Clandinin, 2013), which is a co-composed story of the experiences shared in research conversations. In this process, making space for researcher and participant voices is what not only ensures that I was not world-travelling arrogantly (Lugones, 1987), but also that I was not inserting only my point of view (Paley, 1986). The co-composed nature of a narrative account is what invites a "deeper noticing" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p.95) into the experiences of researchers and participants and a richer understanding of experience.

Once the narrative accounts were composed, Dr. Lessard invited Dr. Clandinin to join him and me in the work of exploring the accounts. I was thrilled at the chance to speak directly to Dr. Clandinin, whose work changed how I thought about research. When we began to meet, I had no idea just how profound an experience these meetings would be, and how much these conversations would enrich my understanding of not only NI, but of the "Girlhood" course itself. It was during these meetings that I began to realize just how feminist the process of NI is, how communal it is. During these months of work and conversations with Dr. Lessard and Dr. Clandinin, I began to see NI's presence in academia as social justice work (Caine, et al., 2018). The collaborative process of identifying and inquiring into narrative threads helped me see the way NI has the potential to change perspectives and enact change.

A narrative thread is a resonance or weaving within or across different stories of participants' experiences. While acknowledging the particularity and uniqueness of each account,

narrative inquirers look into experiences that lift up and carry within them the capacity to create new meaning. This may mean noticing similarities, tensions, and differences within and across experiences as they are lived and told within diverse places, times, and relationships. This stage of the study was challenging, as it required me to rethink my own relationship with "analysis" and to begin to shift instead to a process of searching for threads as a narrative inquirer. As an English student and teacher I have been trained to find and analyse themes. This process is something I learned to do over 35 years in school systems. I came to my first meeting with Dr. Clandinin and Dr. Lessard, having prepared a page of themes I noticed on my own, ready to discuss them. As I began to talk, I could see on their faces, and in the tone of their voices that I was not quite thinking like a narrative inquirer but rather as someone who was analyzing written texts. It was here that my unlearning began. Gently, Dr. Lessard and Dr. Clandinin helped me to understand the difference between following threads and identifying and analyzing themes. It was an incredible experience for me to be able to engage in a conversation with these two leaders in the field of NI, and I think it is worth sharing with you a short explanation of what I took away from this conversation and how I now understand what following threads means.

I now understand the act of analyzing themes is not something that a narrative inquirer values or uses. This is because thematic analysis places boundaries around learning, and suggests a complete understanding is possible. Following threads, on the other hand, is something that happens within communities, slowly over time, and with close attention to individuals' contexts. It is an exchange of ideas and understanding and knowledge that is evolving. It is a process where ideas lift up from the page, echoing others across the research, other experiences, other times. The observations made in this community are then offered up for discussion and are

followed across places and times. Eventually, these noticings will rise up enough that they will be recorded here, not as an absolute or a finding, but as an offering of an experience. As I listened to Dr. Clandinin and Dr. Lessard, I was trying to listen to their words, knowing it was gift to hear them describe this in their own way, but I was at the same time being carried inward, sliding back in time, thinking about my graduate school experience and noticing how my story of coming to think like a narrative inquirer was evolving. All three of us were sliding back in time to other places and relationships. I began to notice that a central reason I may have felt drawn to it because of the way it held space for communion with others. It hit me that this is something I deeply value and have sought out in my life. This relational element was sometimes missing for me in school places throughout my life—the times it did occur, I noted it. I see now it was noteworthy because of its rarity. It began to resonate for me in my conversation with Dr. Clandinin and Dr. Lessard that it was happening again: that the research, my conversations with Alison and Maria, the "Girlhood" course, all included and honoured this relational process in a similar way.

With this new knowledge of the slow, relational work of reviewing and discussing the accounts, I was able to begin the work of inquiring into narrative threads that emerged or rose from the field texts in Maria and Alison's accounts and my own stories. I began reading and re-reading these accounts, each time, trying to locate and pull threads, following them back and forth, inward and outward. Using highlighters, I began to identify sections in the work that called to each other, and repeated; as I did this, I carried my conversations with Dr. Clandinin, Dr. Lessard, Alison and Maria into this work. I saw how the conversations with them showed me threads that my initial "theme search" had missed. This process of following threads, noticing

how some threads are stitched together, while others hang loosely, was made possible through respectful, critical conversation with others. It was made possible through world-travelling, of hearing Dr. Clandinin and Dr. Lessard's experiences of reading the experiences of two participants. It was made possible in my late realization that the accounts were themselves not two squares of crochet, but filled with many squares of their own, looped together with many other stories.

Relational Ethics Beyond Institutional Ethics

I attend to research ethics in two related ways in this research. The first meets the institutional ethics outlined and required by the University of Alberta Review Ethics Board (REB) which requires the protection of the participants and the material (art, stories, conversations) that we generated and collected together as outlined in the General Information Letter and Participant Consent Form. (See Appendices B and C)

The second is relational because of my work with participants both in the course and in the co-created inquiry. When I think about relational accountability, I think with Shawn Wilson (2008) and Lessard (2010, 2014, 2021) who help me understand the circular, supportive, reciprocal, evolving nature of researcher-participant relationships, for me as someone engaging in an inquiry with former students that I have taught and known. I acknowledge that there is an existing rapport between us as a result of the "Girlhood" community of which we were a part. I also acknowledge that our relationship from our work in the course may still hold a kind of power dynamic because of my former position as their teacher. I ensured that they were aware there was no obligation to participate in the research study and that choosing not to participate would not change how I view them as people. I viewed Alison and Maria as co-creators walking

alongside me in the research process, writing, reading drafts and providing mutual and ongoing responses and revision. I acknowledge the interconnectedness (Clandinin, et al., 2016) between myself, the participants and the research. Wilson and Lessard have taught me to recognize that this research is in relation with other relationships that exist beyond the boundaries of my research, and will continue to unfold. I am answerable to all of these relations just by engaging in this research (Wilson, 2008). I ensured that we wrote knowing that once something is written, it may be picked up and carried in ways we do not intend, expect or anticipate (Wilson, 2008, pg. 126). Throughout this process, I was aware and respectful of the interwoven nature of how all these stories will impact each other. I continually sought the insight of the participants on this writing journey to ensure their experience was represented in ways in which they felt heard, and that they feel heard and valued in this process.

A central part of NI is that it views experience as "in the midst [. . .] unfolding over time [. . .] in diverse social contexts and in place and as co-composed in relation" (Caine, Estefan and Clandinin, 2019, p. 266). It also emphasizes our work as inquirers in the research, and acknowledges that inquirers will also be under study (Clandinin et al., 2016). Because of this, at times in this research, I needed to be "self-facing" (p. 37) and consider how I impact and grow along with participants and this study. I acknowledge that however detailed this inquiry may be, it can only ever share a sliver of an experience.

Organization of Study: Noticing the Patterns and Textures

My inquiry explores the experiences of two young women and myself in the "Girlhood" class in order to understand more about how the course shapes the girls' experiences as they continued to compose their lives. I hope that this thesis feels like a story of my research journey,

beginning with sections exploring my research question and autobiographical roots, followed by my literature review and then my research design before flowing into the accounts of the participants, each standing as its own section and finally concluding with an exploration of the narrative threads woven across the accounts.

My study has textures like the stories within them. There are blocks of text, there is poetry, and there are images and journal excerpts. My literature review revealed that separating the personal and academic voices can suggest that the personal voice isn't academic or valid, and this is a position I have resisted. My entire thesis uses a first-person voice, mixing personal with theoretical. I maintain this as much as I can. I include personal writing from journals, poetry and stories from outside this work that wasn't written with this thesis in mind. When this shift in intention occurs, I italicize the writing. The narrative accounts contain multiple voices, mine, and those of my participants. The account of participants' experiences in the "Girlhood" course include stories that shift and move between my experience of their stories and the participants' stories of their experiences in their voices. At those times when participants' voices or writing is woven into the accounts, I have taken pictures of this, or have used a different italicized font to let it stand separate from my own.

My thesis attempts to create an experience of the experience of "Girlhood". Because "[e]xperience is never fixed nor certain" (Caine, Clandinin and Lessard, 2022, p.16), I acknowledge that this thesis will be woven together, shaped by particular views and experiences; the stories told within them will be layered, filled with silences, and shaped by me, and the people I write alongside. This research will represent lived experiences. I hope that the stories within it move through you, engaging your mind, heart, body and spirit. I hope you feel their

presence. I hope the stories will bring us both closer to understanding something about the experiences of feminist ELA courses in high school.

Chapter Four: Meeting Alison and Maria

Introduction to the Narrative Accounts

As I pulled into the driveway of my daughter's day home today,
I noticed a spider web glistening in the sun.
I watched it in the quiet of the afternoon,
noticing the way that it ran from the roof down into a pot of flowers,
unable to see where it ended.

I sat in the golden light,
Watching as
It appeared and disappeared,
Sparkling for a moment,
And then hidden the next.

This gossamer tendril
Was there, but undetectable
Until the miracle occurred,
And the wind blew
This delicate thread into the sun's light.

Minutes would pass before
I could see the shimmering dance again,
Making me wonder if I had imagined it,
And if it was really there.

The narrative accounts you are about to read are an act of inquiry, of praxis, but also an act of hope. They were acts of hope from the moment these specific stories were recorded because in writing them down, on some level, we knew that someone, you, would be reading them and carrying them forward to places we can't see. I imagine you reading Alison and Maria's

accounts, noticing some stories and walking past others, like the strand of web in the poem opening this section, which I wrote after one of my first conversations with Alison. Each time I read these accounts over, I see and ignore something new. I wonder about how the undetected stories will impact you, if at all. I wonder about the stories that will shift into view for you, sparkling, and causing you to wait for another to appear. I recognize your place in this work and the way that your reading of this thesis impacts the stories I share here; I wonder about the ways these stories may impact your own.

I want to briefly introduce you to Alison and Maria before you enter the accounts, as I would if we were at a backyard summer party. I'll tell you a little bit about them, and then walk away, leaving you to get to know them on your own terms.

***

Alison. Alison was a student in the very first offering of "Girlhood" in 2016 in grade 11. There were 22 students. She was a part of the course's first mistakes and triumphs, and a part of why the course continued to grow in the years that followed, slowly being offered in grade 12, and eventually opening up more sections in grade 11 and 12. Over the two years I taught her, I got to know Alison's mom through parent-teacher interviews and through her coming into "Girlhood" as a guest-speaker. I taught Alison's younger brother as well, and we all lived in the same part of the city. I would sometimes run into her mom when we were both out running errands and she would let me know how Alison was doing when she went off to university.

Alison provided invaluable detail in her co-creation of her narrative account; she recalled things in beautiful detail, and often sent me her responses, and photos of her writing or relevant artifacts, like her dad's Master's thesis. At the start of our research conversations, Alison was

finished university, working and deciding where to head next. She was looking into careers, considering graduate school, and began applying for volunteer positions at a women's shelter in the city.

Maria. Maria was in the most recent offering of the "Girlhood" course offered in the spring of 2022 and in the final year I taught the course at that school, having soon after relocated to Ontario with my family. She was in a class with 38 other students. I did not know much about Maria's life from our time together in class, aside from what she shared in her personal writing, or in her spoken word poetry readings. I did not, for example, know her immigration story; I did not know the makeup of her family. I learned all this through our research conversations, and am beginning to understand that though I wasn't aware of these stories, they were present in the classroom and our research conversations even still.

Maria was a co-creator of her narrative account. She sent me her writing and pictures and timelines over text and email, and would immediately respond whenever I had written anything. She was keen to begin each session and had clearly put thought into what she wanted to discuss. At the time our research conversations began, Maria was working part-time and going back to school, deciding to upgrade her marks before applying to university. She chose to use a pseudonym for this research.

A Narrative Account of "Girlhood": Alison

To tell the story of the course, I knew I would need to include more voices than just my own. I was excited when Alison, a former student who had taken "Girlhood" in the very first year it was offered, agreed to participate in my study. I had invited Alison to learn about the

study and consider participating because I felt her view would provide important insight into the early days of the course and help me start at the beginning. As I work through this research and spend many hours writing about my conversations with Alison, I am discovering that it is difficult to know precisely where this story begins. Is it the day she walked into our "Girlhood" class? Is it her biggest memory of the course? Is it her laughing about dressing up in class and acting out plays? Is it the day she responded to my first email telling her about the research? Is it the day she walked into the restaurant for our first meeting after 5 years apart? Is it at the parent-teacher conference where I first met her mom? Is it at the junior high party where she met her best friend Sara? Or is it in 1986 when her dad wrote his Master's thesis on the gender pay gap?

And as I moved deeper into my inquiry into Alison's experiences of the course, more and more layers began to uncover themselves. So many experiences are woven into the tapestry of the course that it has become difficult to decide where to begin. It feels like an infinite task, but, where I begin is ultimately a choice I have had to make. Despite this exposition rooting itself where I have chosen to plant it, it becomes impossible not to slide back and forth in time, leaping back to antecedents, and jumping forward to futures we can't see or even imagine. I hope you will see that this movement between different times and places is important and carries within it the textures of the course. To make you feel how the course feels and breaths, it has to read like a life: rich, complex, in the midst of things, flowing forwards and backwards, and never one thing in one way.

Thank you to everyone who made telling this story possible, including those I don't know, but who have shaped Alison's journey. Thank you reader for reading it with care, knowing it is an account of a real person's experience. And thank you, Alison, for allowing me the honour of telling it.

Reconnection

I arrive at the restaurant first and pick a seat near the window. I leave the seat with the street view empty for Alison so that she will be able to look out of it at the busy summer street. I could remember in class that sometimes I would catch her looking out the window…not in a disrespectful way, I could tell she was always listening, but sometimes she just needed to be able to break the gaze or think on her own. She had energy within her then, a leg always shaking, a quickness to her stride, a passion and energy that needed to get out, and sometimes was stifled and controlled by the classroom desks. It was never a problem for her, but I always noticed that she had energy and spirit.

I worry this might be weird for her, meeting her old teacher. She was a student in my first-ever Girlhood class, in her grade 11 year in 2016. I haven't seen her in 4 years, since I went on maternity leave in June 2018 and gave birth to my daughter, Poppy. She has spent those years living out of the province going to university in Ontario. I have run into her mom out in the city, but I know many things have changed for her since her final year of high school. I look at the restaurant, so modern and well-designed, hoping that she will like it. I chose it hoping she would. Would a 22-year-old think this is cool? I sit wondering, turning over the sparse menu, realizing she is the same age now that I was when I started teaching.

I order a cappuccino and wait, taking in the beautiful turquoise-painted tile, the dark navy walls, the art, the sounds of the conversations around me and the noise of the street behind me. My phone lights up with a text from Alison: Just finding parking. I'll be right there. I smile because I can see that she is still reliable and consistent—she always shows up even if she is a few minutes late.

When she comes in through the door, she looks exactly the same: the same twinkle in her green eyes, the same ease and grace in how she dresses, the same confidence. My concern about awkwardness quickly fades as we hug each other, and we quickly slide right back into the easy chatter I remember from when she was in my classes four years ago. She has just recently graduated from university with a business certificate and a degree in political studies. She is excited to tell me about it and shares her interest in pursuing a master's degree in policy studies so that she could be better equipped to advocate for the groups she cares about: women, new Canadians, and Indigenous peoples. She immediately shares that all she wants is to work with people in the community. Her spirit and curiosity and ease with people haven't changed. I know this is one of her gifts—her ability to listen, and her warmth. I know she will be good at this work.

We pause to order and ask for the same breakfast, eggs benedict, and she gets bacon on the side. As her latte arrives, I listen as she tells me more about the university, about a girls club she was a part of there: young university students would go into local high schools and meet with girls—to talk about body image, healthy relationships within friendships and romantic partners, pressures in the media. I feel so proud of her as she tells me this, and I wonder if "Girlhood" is what I see rippling forward in this work she is pursuing.

We eat our meal, and she tells me she is planning to travel this summer to Amsterdam, Paris and Italy with two friends who also took the course. We reminisce about them, and I am happy to hear they are still good friends. Their closeness runs deep and has been sustained through distance. Later in our research conversations together, Alison invites one of these friends, Sara, to join our discussions and share her "Girlhood" experiences too. They met at a party in 9th grade and solidified their closeness when they attended the same large urban high school. These

years were formative in shaping their bond. Their solidarity as friends is nothing like the archetypal depictions of young female friendships we sometimes see trivialized in the media. The way they tell the stories of their friendship, the laughter, the love, the heartbreaks, and the betrayals between them, are shared as one story with one voice. It is as if their friendship is another entity, separate from their independent selves while reinforcing their individual identities at the same time.

I know the importance of this, these ties to other women and notice as I write this narrative account, pouring over notes and transcripts that Alison's deeply rooted connection with all the women in her life, but most significantly, her mom. She speaks often of her mom, naturally, casually and with deep love and respect. Alison describes her mom as a "crowd pleaser" who she confides in and admires and reminds me of the time when she chose to celebrate her mom for our Phenomenal Woman project in "Girlhood", a task where the students recognized the accomplishments of amazing women in their own lives and communities. Rather than opt for a presentation or speech about her mom, Alison invited her mom into the class and interviewed her, allowing us to bear witness to the stories her mom wanted to share. Alison brought her home place into the school place and she did it proudly. I can remember listening to Alison interview her mom, and the easy way they spoke with each other, neither one appeared nervous and were both warm, intelligent and engaged. Her mom talked about her career, and about balancing work with being a mom. She talked about her friendships and her relationships with her family. It was special for all of us to witness this.

As I tell Alison about my research project, I share my big questions with her and explain that I am interested in hearing about her experiences within the course. She listens, nodding and

sipping her latte. I'd love to hear what you remember, I tell her. It felt different to me, and I'd like to hear what you remember about it.

I remember a lot, she smiles. What we covered in the course helped me. It was a fun class. We say our goodbyes and walk back to our cars, and when I get into mine, I sit in the front seat looking at the parking lot and the giant trees that surround it. I'm curious about the feltness (Springgay, 2020) of the course. I want to know what she means when she tells me that the course helped her.

The Stories

For our next meeting, we decide to sit down outside on the patio of an Italian bakery located halfway between our homes. The sun is shining, and my son, Henry, is with me because I was unable to find childcare or a friend for him to have a playdate with. I order him lemon sorbet, a rootbeer, a sucker, and a croissant…food to keep an 8-year-old occupied while Alison and I chat. We sit at our small white table with an umbrella, and I begin to pull out my recorder and notepad. As she waits, remembering he likes hockey, Alison shows Henry pictures on her phone of her on the ice after the local Junior A Hockey Team won the national championship. Henry was at that game too and thinks it is pretty cool they were both there at the same time and that she knows some of the players. I smile watching them together. Henry wasn't even in school when Alison was in my class and is now entering grade 4.

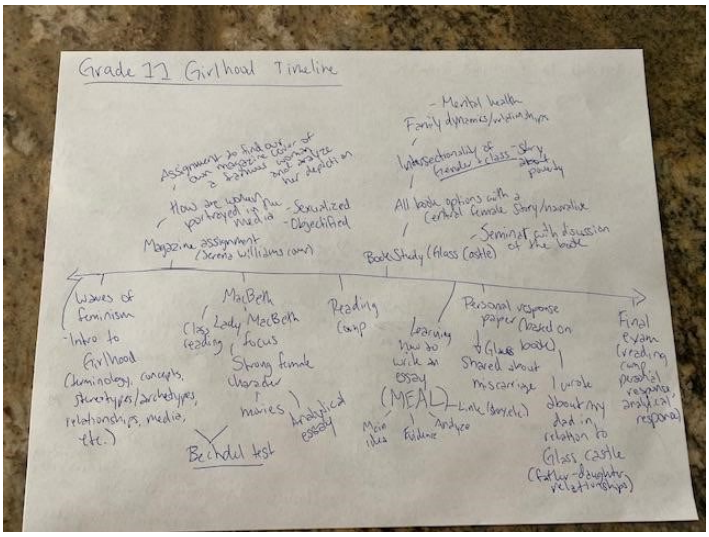

Figure 3: A picture of Alison's timeline for "Girlhood" in grade 11.

As Henry tucks into his sorbet, we begin to talk. Alison shows me the timeline I asked her to make, accounting for her memories of the course. The pages are full. Two of them, one for grade 11 and one for grade 12. I ask her to tell me about whichever memory stood out to her the most. I want her to choose where we begin:

> *Alison: It was nice to have a teacher that was so open and so honest. And like even when you talked about what it was like, everybody's like "oh ya being pregnant and having a baby is so amazing", but you were like, "guys, it's tough". (laughs) And how you talked about how it was your girlfriends that really like got you through, like when you first had a baby and were like, like hadn't showered for 5 days and they came over and like wanted to see your baby, and you were like guys, it was rough. Like it's not all sunshine and happiness. And like when you were struggling, you told us how John was great, obviously, because he is your partner, but it was your girlfriends that got you through it. I remember you said that, like, word for word. And it was just like nice, you know, it was eye-opening to have a teacher be so open and real. Like, guys, I'm going to be honest with you, this is what reality is. We were all girls there at that time.*

Alison remembers being offered stories that addressed the complexities of women's lives. It was also novel for her to encounter a teacher who was willing to step away from the positioning she had come to expect from teachers and into a space of personal story as well. She felt it was important that we talk about nuanced experiences, ones that were both happy and difficult and in her words, "real". Alison shares that this was the first time that she had ever seen female community and connection discussed in this way, as something of importance, and vital. Throughout our conversations, Alison alludes to this type of learning, experiential, focussed on the nuance and discussion as

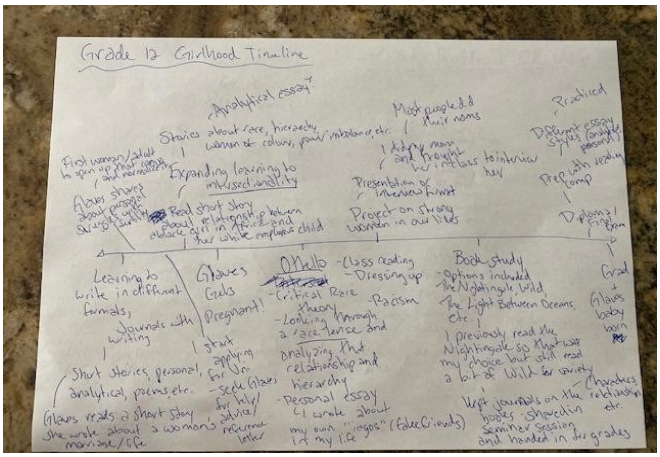

Figure 4: A picture of Alison's timeline for "Girlhood" in grade 12

significant. It was a different style of classroom experience for her, especially to have one that affirmed and valued female connection and relationships. Alison saw these types of stories, women's stories, stories that had nuance, complexity, darkness and hope as something new. This is what sits with me. That there was a novelty to hearing these stories in school. These stories hadn't had much space in her school life until she was 16 or 17. They didn't match the other stories she had read, or been told about in

school, so she listened to these new stories carefully. I think about how Alison's receiving of this calls to my own memories of university classes that elevated these stories and wonder if, and how, her journey will be impacted because she encountered this knowledge sooner.

Beginnings

Amidst our research conversations, my family and I moved to Ontario. It was something my husband and I had considered for a long time; the pandemic and my daughter's Cerebral Palsy diagnosis made the isolation from family really started to feel too heavy. We wanted both of our kids to grow up with their family around them, and we knew we needed that community around us also. So, when my husband got a job offer at a university in Ontario, we decided to take it. I talked with Alison about this pull towards family and home and she understood, having a similar story woven into her family, who too had moved from Ontario to Alberta, and had sometimes felt drawn back home.

In our first online meeting, after working out the kinks of weak internet connections, getting the volume right, and getting comfortable, it feels different looking at a pixelated version of Alison. When I play back the recording of our conversation and listen, our voices sound the same together as when we were in person, and I'm sure no one else would notice, but I know that

what is missing in that ineffable exchange that occurs when you're in the same room, exchanging looks, and smiles and hearing the sounds. There is an affect in this technological space that is impossible to recreate even with the best computer screens and applications. What transcends and works to weave that gap closed is the stories that we share.

When I ask Alison what caused her to sign up for "Girlhood", she tells me it was because her friend had told her about it. She thought it sounded cool and that she didn't really put much thought into it. She tells me, eyes twinkling that when she walked into "Girlhood" she was more focussed on a recent summer camp breakup, catapulting her for the first time into the "real pain", and emotional turmoil of a romance ending at 16. This decision to enroll at first seems impulsive or even flippant, but over time, it becomes clearer that this choice was nurtured and percolating for a long time before she ever joined.

One day after going through her dad's belongings with her mom the day before we met, Alison found her dad's Master's thesis. She tells me he went to the London School of Business and wrote about the gender pay gap between women and men in Ontario. He published his thesis in 1986. She shares this news right away in one of our meetings, and we are both excited about this discovery, seeing the links all the way back to her dad and knowing he's a part of what led her to the course. She sends me pictures throughout the day, of the title page, the index, some chapters, and some piles of work. I look at these images she sent me later that day, the title, the handwriting peeking out of the top, and I wonder about her dad, who I never had the chance to meet, and how he has also shaped her. I remember from the course the way she would write about her dad when she was in my classes, exploring themes of guilt, of grief, of love. This small artifact, this Master's thesis examining wage gaps for women in Ontario carries with it many other answers about the way that Alison responds to the course, decides to join it, notices

inequities, and cares about being critical. Her supportive, progressive parents are part of every little story she shares; she is confident and clear about how she moves through her worlds. She is rooted in family stories and connections well beyond the course. I want to honour that her spirit has been nurtured and encouraged by her family who allows her to invite curiosity about people's stories and take them in, and pass them on. That she found this thesis recently, not knowing about it in this way, feels like a gift, a document of her past, arriving and uncovered, meaning more now than I can capture here.

Alison's stories show me that for her, the first feminist seeds were planted much before the course began. The steadiness she was nestled in makes me realize something that was already growing before I ever went to university and learned about Feminism and before I ever thought of creating "Girlhood". I see that Alison's relationship with her dad is not nestled within the course, but that for her, the course is planted in something already rooted, already in progress. My thinking begins to change around my question about the impact a course like "Girlhood" has for the students. I had previously thought that "Girlhood" might be the starting point in the students' feminist journeys but Alison is teaching me that perhaps its role isn't planting, but feeding and nourishing what is already there, carefully tending to what was started by people and places I may never know.

Preparations

Alison shares that the stories from "Girlhood" transcend regular ELA class discussions. The stories, ours now, the ones from the class, literature, are a part of what, in Alison's words, "prepare you". Despite this incredible foundation she had at home, Alison points to a yearning to

know more. Alison alluded to a desire to know how to navigate worlds that they have experienced, which tells them they are at times reduced, at times not safe. Alison describes many aspects of the course in this way, as preparation, as a tool, as armour for her journey that will continue far beyond the course itself:

> *The first thing I put down on my timeline was the intro to "Girlhood" and what the terminology and concepts were. Things like stereotypes, archetypes, relationships, and media and I remember learning about the waves of feminism, and the Bechdel test, which then we went on and looked at when we looked at clips of movies and stuff. So that was the first thing. Like what is this, what are we going to look at? That terminology and those concepts were like stuff I have always remembered and carried with me. It's not like algebra where you remember it for a test and are then like, ok, bye. All those terms and concepts were so helpful to know [...] I was just like, I had no idea, I had not even thought about how women are portrayed in the media. And like Serena Williams has like made her mark as an athlete, not to mention a female athlete but a black female athlete which was very rare for the sport she was in and then she was on a magazine cover naked. And you were like who is this for? It's probably not for her- maybe it is, but it's also to sexualize her and paint her as an object. And I was like Oh my god and I had never realized that before. And then we had to find another magazine cover and analyze it. I remember when I was trying to choose, there were too many options.* [...] *It was eye-opening, especially at that age.*

Alison remembers that learning a language to engage and think about the world in a more critical way gave her the confidence required to ask questions, offer critique and be challenged herself. She thinks about her knowledge as something that is carried forward, an added resource that helps her navigate the world as a woman. Her first steps in the course and the moments that appear on her timeline are all about awakening to injustices that circumstances, systems and experiences made impossible to see. She describes in our conversations the moments she began recognizing inequity in places that she hadn't before and the way the course helped emphasize gaps in her knowledge, pushing the boundaries of her awareness wider.

She tells me she thinks about all of this as she now enters the workforce and makes decisions about the industries she wants to work in, and the types of romantic partners she wants to live her life with. She explains with nuanced language that the course helped her determine with more clarity what she wants for her life. These course encounters raised her consciousness and helped her see the world differently "for the first time". She emphasizes that her awareness made her more sharply aware of the inequities in the systems she moves through, and keener to know about the experiences of other women than herself. Casting light onto these stories is an important part of the course and helped her prepare for her life outside of this school place.

Threading in Textures

Alison had mentioned to her friend Sara that she was talking to me about my research and Sara had gotten in touch with me, mentioning that she had written about "Girlhood" in her Medical School Applications and that she would like to join in our conversations. I talked to Dr. Lessard and he was enthusiastic about this opportunity for another voice to be included, telling me simply, "See what you find". So after Sara read the information letter and signed the consent forms, we all met virtually, me in Ontario and Alison and Sara sitting together at a counter in Alison's mom's house to see what we could find.

The view of them on the screen smiling and happy is so awesome to see. I haven't seen Sara in 5 years, but I can immediately recognize that their closeness and ease with each other are even more established now. They are comfortable together and finish each other's sentences. Despite the years passing, Sara still moves with the warmth and kindness I remember. When she speaks it is with intelligence, thoughtfulness, warmth, positivity, and clarity. I smile to see them

together, and we jump right into chatting, and it feels like not so much time has passed. They are excited to share with me the details of their upcoming trip to Europe, which they have been planning for a while. They leave soon, and speak together about each of the places they are going, and what they want to see and do. Alison tells me they are all getting tattoos to commemorate the trip before Sara jumps in and tells me she isn't so sure and will just watch them get one and be there for support.

Even though they have different passions, skills, and personalities, Alison and Sara are still tied together, and in their diverse career pursuits, they are linked by a desire to be involved in working toward equity and justice. I can feel what an opportunity it is to have both of them here together, to talk about the course. And after we finish talking about their nearly month-long travel plan, we dive into their experiences of the course.

Both Alison and Sara both were in the first two iterations of the class, the first and second years it was offered respectively, though never in the same class together. Their experiences of the course are important to hear as we worked together as students and teachers, to shape what the course became 6 years later. In the beginning, the course was 2 sections of grade 11, and the next year it included grade 11 and grade 12, and each year it continued to grow.

In our conversation, Sara and Alison mention the appeal of the course was in the freedom of the stories, the exposure to different stories, and the emphasis on the choices that existed. This emphasis on diversity and choice was something magnetic and something they perceived as unique in school. They desired stories that prepared them in the way that stories do, not through rote memorization but through the examples of the characters that live within them. The stories they remembered were different, neither one talked about the same one—they connected to different writers and different plot lines. These stories taught them different things, taking them

down different pathways. Alison and Sara used the class to explore the textures exposed in nuanced experiences, and begin framing systems that they wanted to live by:

> *Alison: Well I remember at the beginning, we read a short story about a girl in Africa, I don't remember the name... she fell in love with her employer's son and it was one of the first short stories we read that was really big for me because that really expanded the learning on intersectionality. We weren't just looking at female stories, we were looking at race, power dynamics, how he would treat her, and how they were secret lovers and race was a big thing in it. And like I remember we did that one, and talked a lot about it, and wrote stories about it. It was the first time I really thought about intersectionality.*
>
> *Sara: Ya I remember that intersectionality was a big thing when we were talking about Othello. And how it was the first time for me that I understood intersectionality and its role in feminism also being able to look at race theory I think was necessary. I think going into the class, I thought oh we're just going to talk about female authors and we might like to delve into female perspectives, but really looking at other areas of inequality really stood out to me in the class and just made me more passionate about it in general.*

Sara and Alison both valued being provided with choices and the opportunity to choose and explore diverse stories and works, armed with the language that helps us consider the stories more deeply, beyond simply their plot structure and characterization. They moved on from a shallow understanding of feminism and began to see how the patriarchy's manipulation of race and gender and class impact men and women differently. Until this point, Sara and Alison had heard of intersectionality through social media, but "Girlhood" provided a deeper consciousness-raising, it allowed them to name their world (Friere 1970/2017) and illuminate what it was they were seeing. Being aware of the intersections allowed them to widen where they looked and who they saw when they considered oppressive systems.

Writing Themselves

The opportunity to read diverse stories invited Sara and Alison to engage in writing diverse stories. Both participants recalled the process of writing about their own lives in the course and mentioned specific topics and pieces they wrote. Alison wrote about her dad and his passing, and Sara wrote about her friendships. Writing with the intention of knowing themselves was something they liked to do, something that they felt "came easily" and that they were "good at". It validated their stories and gave them room to think critically about them and how they shaped their lived experience but also gave them the confidence to feel that their experiential stories were worth sharing, not only in a Feminist ELA course, but in new spaces, and ones that have not always been open to this kind of writing.

This personal writing, which was sometimes shared in class, is something they feel helped in the shaping of their individual connections to the world around them and their awareness of areas of inequity. Alison and Sara allude to their critical views of politicians, and the treatment of women in different countries and within their own. They speak about their workplaces, refusing certain conditions and misogyny, and they critique celebrity culture, social media, and higher education. They speak with clarity and with compassion. This glimpse into their current stories of themselves is a future that I was not privy to when I taught them years ago. This conversation about these years is for me the most powerful one from our meeting with the three of us; a story lifts up from it, pointing to horizons, and allowing me to think about the threads going forward from the course in a new way, tracing their paths all the way back from before the course began, through it, and then beyond it. I include the conversation here as it happened on that day, so that you may see the threads that spill forward for yourself:

Sara: But I don't think I would have taken a Women and Gender Studies Course going into university if I hadn't taken "Girlhood". I talk about "Girlhood" in my med school applications because it sparked me to take these other things in university. "Girlhood" pushed me to take Women and Gender Studies, which I really enjoyed, which led me to the leadership course I took. There was a project involved and it was a 200-hour summer project. My project ended up being with a non-profit called "No period without" so we were trying to get free menstrual hygiene products available in business washrooms and that became a norm. Like how businesses provide toilet paper or hand soap. And so I helped them develop a formal contract for that and eventually actually reached out to the businesses. A big part of that for me- you had mentioned Alison's mom being a feminist and her dad, but in my family, not that my dad isn't a feminist, but we just always butt heads on politics my whole life, and just doing that project I was able to get his business, a construction business with three women in his office to get him to provide that. When you explain it to him as a need, imagine you had to walk around with toilet paper in your purse or bag, so explaining it in that way helped. And he was like, "Oh I guess, but will they think it's weird that I am providing that to them, isn't that overstepping a boundary?" and I think even that perception is a part of the problem in itself. It was a big learning thing for me. There were so many aspects of that - I had never dealt with business-like lingo, like product stocking and so much of that was a learning process, what drove me to do it was the advocacy behind it. A big part of doing that was learning how to advocate for people…I think it opened my eyes more to intersectionality and even the language we use in the period pledge, like referring to people as "menstruators" and not just women, because you're closing that door. And then you can explain why it might be necessary to provide these products in male washrooms as well. But I feel that taking the "Girlhood" course really sparked…it was kind of that moment for me. Where I was like oh, Not like oh I'm a feminist, but it really was the first time I had learned about it in an important way and it made me realize that it was something I wanted to continue to do and learn about and work in this field.

Alison: Same. I don't think you're giving yourself enough credit, Glaves. I think for me, Sara and Jenn [another former "Girlhood" student, whose name has been changed] it was a holy shit moment. Out of the 5 of our girlfriends, 3 of us took it, and we three were the ones who did like extracurriculars in university that related to women and gender. Sara did that, I was in a couple of Women and Gender clubs, I was a part of the Indigo Girls program, and Jenn took those classes too. I think it is interesting that out of the five of [our best friends], the three that took that class and learned it in high school really carried it through in university and already had that interest and education to want to keep doing stuff afterwards.

Sara: Maybe I would say it inspired us… Alison: It empowered us.

Sara: It drove me to continue to want to learn about it. It empowered me to speak about feminism or to share my ideas on it.

Alison: Ya, and even just to have the knowledge and terminology. Like it's not as if my friends aren't feminists; sometimes my friends will say stuff, and I know what she's trying to say, but I'm just like, 'that's not correct. […] And sometimes I understand the message you're trying to say…but no. Do you know what I mean? I think having the terminology and education so early on…it was like…um, I'm trying to think of a good metaphor…it was like a stepping stone. Like the first one, the big one. And then there's a whole world out there.

Sara: And it leads to all these other things. It opened up the door to so many other things. When I went into a Women and Gender Studies class I was able to like raise my hand and talk about things because I felt that I knew what I was talking about because we had already learnt about some of it, whereas maybe some other people it was their first time in that space. And I don't think I would have even signed up for that class if I hadn't taken "Girlhood", especially in a science degree program. Like when I would tell people I was taking it, they would be like, oh, why that one? I was the random one in the bunch.

Alison: It really did change the trajectory for us, and what we chose to study after high school. I think the common denominator for the three of us in our friend group who took the class was taking this class and then pursuing it even more later on. It wasn't just a class where we were like, okay I'm done. I'm moving on. It was like, "Okay, this was important, I learned a lot, what else can I keep doing to keep educating myself and educating others after and long term".

These stories, told by Alison and Sara, highlight the way that they have perceived the course in their lives, as "*a stepping stone. Like the first one, the big one. And then there's a whole world out there."* The course served as another important stepping stone on a pathway already formed. To see the way they have come to enact the things they learned, the way they engage in praxis and allow that praxis to evoke and create change is inspiring and humbling. "Girlhood" invited students to examine the storied threads they carried into the course, and sometimes, showed them

new threads that might be woven into their stories as well. I am overwhelmed that I was able to witness this story because it is a rare gift to gather with former students—you don't often get to sit down with them this way and hear how their stories continued. That I am lucky enough to hear from these two, is an enormous honour. Now they are woven into this research, and I pull the threads forward with me, and new crocheted loops take shape. And this helps me see more clearly through this story, an answer to my question "What does the "Girlhood" course do?"

The Presence of Feeling

We aimed to meet one more time, to both hear about Alison's European trip, but also speak about the smaller pieces I had written. I think both of us wondered what was left to say, but it turns out our fifth meeting blossomed quickly into the discovery of another important piece of the puzzle that helps shape the answer to "What does the "Girlhood" course do?". Alison has a new hairstyle for this meeting, new fringe bangs, that suit her so well. To talk about the ways this happened in class, and the way it continued in the research conversations we had is significant to me. She tells me Paris was her favorite city, and that she and one of the girls on the trip did end up getting tattoos after all. She sent me pictures of the trip and, in them, I see three young and beautiful friends, beaming. Their joy and happiness and love for each other are in every single shot. We chat a little bit about the research project and I tell her about some threads that are woven across our conversations. I say them out loud to her, and then I ask her if there is anything from the course or timeline that she would like to add, or if she can see anything I am missing. She tells me that she talked about our research with her friends on the trip and that she had been thinking about what the course did:

Alison: I think something I learned from the class is an appreciation for other women. We celebrated other women a lot, and I learned, I mean I was never a woman hater, but I feel the projects and discussions we had were really important. You asked us to look at significant women in our lives, and talk about WHY they're important and what they have done. [...] I chose my mom. And when you talked about your miscarriage and told us that your female friends are what got you through that time and pushed you forward. I learned to appreciate my female friendships and each female friend for their individual strengths. I still carry that forward a lot today. I love them so much. It's a kinship that has survived those transitional periods [...]

Mel: Why do you think that is? Are those friendships not normally valued in school? Why did the course help you lift them up?

Alison: In so many stories we learn in school, they are so male focussed. Women are the love interest, or on the sidelines. In high school, there just aren't many that are offered for the purpose of exploring female relationships. Like The Nightingale, that book was about sisters. But so many others are about romantic relationships and there is so much emphasis placed on that. The point is to find a boyfriend or husband, and that is the end-all-be-all. And the course helped make it okay for me to not feel like that is the most important thing in the world is my relationship with men. Me, I love my boyfriend, but I would die if I lost my girlfriends.

Alison draws my attention to the space the course holds for celebrating solidarity amongst women and makes me think about the texts offered differently. I had not really stopped and thought about this much. It seemed obvious to me that in a feminist course, we would address female-centered stories by female authors when possible. I tried to balance offering diverse authors from different perspectives who had very different views with curriculum standards, like Shakespeare. But my conversation with Alison makes me think about this offering as a specific transgressive action. The simple insistence on these stories' presence, and the discussion of these stories, made room for Alison to value her female relationships. The course gave the students permission to freely consider and investigate the dynamics of women as they are represented in literature. And as she speaks, and names the texts she remembers, they are all modern texts, not

from the canon. I think this says something important. These stories of today are different, and important to get into the hands of students. This is not to discount the importance of the literary canon, and by canon, I mean Western British or Canadian literature taught in Canadian schools. The stories included in the canon are important in how they are a part of the lineage of writing in Canada and other places; however, these are often from the viewpoints of white men, or white women. Offering stories written about women, by women with diverse perspectives informed by different races, cultures, classes, sexualities, and expansive gender identities, change the way the stories are told and which stories are told. These stories empower all students, but especially young women because they can see their relationships in a different way. The mere presence of these stories is important. If you are someone like me, someone in education, or academia, you know what I am saying is not new. What is illuminating for me though, is how the advocacy for texts, diverse stories and many choices for students is really vital to a feminist course in high school. It does set the course apart. The offering and valuing of authors and stories that are not in the canon is a feminist act: it makes room for voices that even today are still omitted from classrooms, for a variety of reasons.

For Alison, the importance of diverse stories evolves past what we know to be true about empathy, about literacy: it grants students the space to proudly proclaim loyalty to, and valuing of, female bonds. Alison spoke about how her experiences in the course gave her the confidence to resist the pressure to fall into the common archetype of a competitive or jealous female. She tells me about the pressure to compete for friends, for male attention, as she entered high school. She shares that the stories we read, and the personal stories I shared affirmed for her that it was okay to see those female relationships as vital. It was okay to hold them close, proudly. This is new thinking for me. That the course showed her a different way of being, and the confidence to

move forward in a different way, a way that allowed her to transgress the boundaries that framed how she been taught as a young woman and girl.

In all of our conversations, Alison returns to joy. I think of the ways that this echoes bell hooks (2001), who writes about joy, about love. I have found it difficult in this research to know what is important to include. Listening to and transcribing hours of conversations has been uplifting and overwhelming. Which threads do I leave in? Which threads do I leave out? I find myself often thinking about what stories glow and which stories I should tell. I worry that I won't be able to capture what she tells me about the course. I don't know how to represent the way we speak about the feeling.

Our conversations uncover moments and textures that I had not anticipated, and dismissed, thinking they would not be received well in the academic space of a Master's thesis. But in our final conversation, something came up again that did not allow me to disregard it. It is something Alison spoke about in an early conversation, we spoke about it again with Sara and I, and Alison returned to it again in our final conversation. She recalled the times we acted out the Shakespeare plays we studied rather than simply reading them; she recalled the way we wore costumes and laughed, and moved around as we analyzed them. She returned this experience to our conversation gently and helped ensure I would finally see it. I had avoided it, because it was about how in our classes, when it came time to study Shakespeare, we read the text together, in costume first; students volunteered for roles, and everyone was invited to read. I think I ignored this because it seemed to not be about the course, per se. It was just a choice I made to help the students immerse themselves in the play with their whole bodies and I didn't think it had relevance to my research question. I found that this was necessary and helped deepen our discussions later on. But as Alison brought it up yet again, I awakened to what she was saying,

and why she kept returning to it. Below is a note that I wrote in my notebook right after our conversation:

> *Dressing up and acting out Shakespeare came up again today…Alison mentioned that she and Jenn [another student] had talked about it on their trip to Europe, how much they remember that part of the course and that it was fun. She told me that studying the play that way made it easier to understand the play. She told me, "It was fun and that is what allowed us to then really understand and critically talk about it". I remember those days clearly. I'd have a bag of random costumes that me and the students would put on, and we would all take on parts. Everyone would "act" out a part. It was loud and chaotic and fun. Alison brought up the laughter she remembered and I can remember laughing too, fully pregnant with Poppy while we read Othello. Real true laughter. Laughter where tears come from my eyes, laughter that made me forget about anything else but that moment in that room, laughter that made me yell "stop!" at them begging them to stop making me laugh, tears streaming down my face, scared I would given birth to my baby right there in the room.*

I struggled to name the feeling of the course or to describe it to other people. "It's the vibe". "This class has a different feeling", I tell them. But my conversations with Alison help me come closer to naming it. And I am surprised by the simplicity of the words that are rising up for me: the fun is a part of it. It is the active choice to find joy. For Alison, in this class, we felt joy together. It was proof that girls could support each other and be playful. This joyfulness pushed against conceptualizations of female relationships she had been warned about or seen previously, relationships between women that were competitive or jealous. These narrow ideas were something she worried about when she had entered high school. Our laughter pushed against the perception that we are always serious, always angry as feminists. And while sometimes we are angry and refuse to remove our anger and use our anger, other times, joy also exists. There is an elevation that joy provides. Moving with joy, in dialogue, in thinking, in analysis, in critique. The joy helped Alison see further out. Thank you, Alison, for helping me see it.

A Narrative Account of "Girlhood": Maria

When Maria agreed to participate in this research, I was really happy because I wanted to include a person who had taken the course more recently. I knew the course had changed and evolved since the first year when Alison had taken it. Maria's life views and experiences seemed to me to be different from my own. I had experienced her as someone often shining a light on topics and views that I could not illuminate. I felt that she held me accountable and demanded that I see things in the class and in this research that I had not seen. Maria was an active participant in this research as when I sent her drafts of this narrative account she made changes and clarifications, asking me to emphasize details that I glossed over, and removing things she felt were not accurate. Maria is someone who I admire and for whom I am grateful. She taught me so much during our time in class together, and I feel honored that she walked alongside me in this research where I learned even more by hearing her stories. Maria brought me closer to understanding what the course does for her. She awakened me to its impact in ways I did not anticipate, by sharing experiences as someone of a race, culture, and language that are not mine. She illuminated the potential and limitations of the course, and she did this in a way that was honest and loving. Maria, I can never thank you enough for coming along on this journey with me.

…

Learning where she stands

I hadn't seen Maria in months and even though it was a relatively short time, so much had changed. She had graduated, months had passed, I moved across the country with my family, and

a new school year had begun. I sat down at my desk and called her at exactly 4:30 pm Mountain Standard time, knowing she was busy with family and school. She answered immediately and right away her big smile brought a smile to my face. Her face is so beautiful, kind, always smiling, with a twinkle in her eye. Her brown eyes are warm and also reveal the many stories and responsibilities that she has to carry. Maria moves through the world with humour, steadiness, and grace. It is good to see her even if it is through a screen, framed by the blank cream-coloured wall behind her.

I felt nervous as I clicked the button that began our call; I was worried that she would feel weird talking to her old teacher outside of school on a virtual call. With my other research participant, there was temporal space between the time we spent together in the classroom, and, with that time, I felt the rituals and positions of teacher and student faded. For Maria, it was more recent—I had been her teacher only a short time ago, and she still called me Miss Glaves in our conversations and correspondence. But as soon as we got over a few awkward pleasantries, we fell into our easy banter, and she told me about her new year, upgrading her English and social studies, and chemistry classes, wanting to keep her options open and wanting to ensure her marks are the best they can be. She is not sure about her path yet, but after learning about architectural design, she feels that it might be a good place to explore. She speaks quickly and with candour, with each word articulated with facial expressions and hand gestures. She is animated and alive.

As we continued catching up, I heard a door open and saw Maria's eyes dart to the side. I heard a child's voice and saw this person's presence was distracting her. I could tell she felt unsure about to whom she should give her attention: the new arrival or me. I tell her not to worry and that if she needed to go, we could reschedule our meeting. She tells me it's her sister, Bella

[name has been changed], who came into the room, and a bright red shirt moves onto the screen as Maria gently pulls her sister into view. She looks at her sister with love, her face framed by her hijab loosely draped so that it covers her hair. She smiles warmly as she tells me about her sister, who is nine, the same age as my son. When I say "Hello" to her sister and ask how she is doing, Maria explains that Bella can't answer with words because of her autism, and both of them smile at me as I say I am happy she is here. She shares with me that Bella usually likes to sit on Maria's bed while she works in her room. I hear their mother's voice in the background, and Maria responds in Somali before seamlessly translating for me in English what her mom said, telling me she had been asking after her sister. Bella leaves the room to be with her mom and closes the door. Maria is the oldest of four kids. She has 3 younger siblings, two sisters ages 9 and 16 and a 7-year-old brother. *It comes with responsibility, being the oldest*, she tells me, and I nod, my head knowing it is true.

Taking chances

After going over the plan for the research and my research question, we start to talk about her big memories from the Girlhood course. Right away she tells me one that stands out to her is the time she wrote a 100-word story/poem about her dad. It is a moment I had written down too in my pre-writing before our meeting and I am grateful to know that it was powerful for both of us:

> *Mel: Okay do you have any big memories that right off the hop, stand out to you about the class?*
>
> *Maria: Um my biggest one was when I cried in class talking about my dad. That was a really big one for me. Because I don't get emotional easily. I know how to*

suppress my emotions. I learned that as a kid. To just start suppressing my emotions…

Mel: Mmhmm.

Maria: so then when I read it, I just started crying and I was like "what is happening?". My voice started breaking, and I was like "well, I'm going to have to continue" and I just let myself cry and continue.

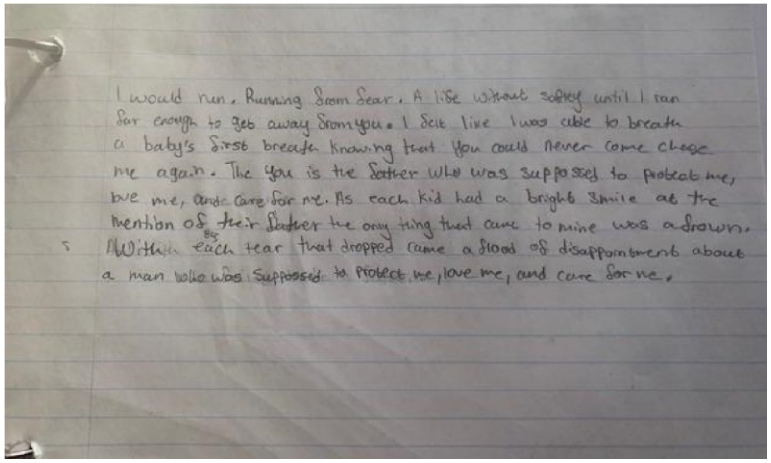
I would run. Running from fear. A life without safety until I ran far enough to get away from you. I felt like I was able to breath a baby's first breath knowing that you could never come close me again. The you is the father who was supposed to protect me, love me, and care for me. As each kid had a bright smile at the mention of their father the only thing that came to mine was a frown. With each tear that dropped came a flood of disappointment about a man who was supposed to protect me, love me, and care for me.

Figure 5: A picture of Maria's 100-word poem written in grade 12 "Girlhood".

Mel: That was 100 percent a moment I have written down. We did 100 word stories as poems and you could choose if you wanted to share, and when you shared yours and it was one of those moments where everybody was like, quiet, and just listening to you read. It was so powerful and I will never forget it. And I was like…you don't always get to see everyone's face when you're reading something… but from where I was sitting, I could see, and it was amazing to see [your classmates] faces and how you commanded everyone's attention. It was an honour to hear you read that.

*Maria: You know, Ada [name has been changed] came up to me after and Ada was like, "girl, I love your poem. Like I actually understand where you're coming from". She was like "I got daddy issues too", and I was like *nods**

Mel: Did she really come up to you after? Awww.

Maria: Ya and she was like 'I was tearing up and everything". I was trying to hide myself a little bit and for a minute I couldn't read the paper. The tears were covering the paper.

Mel: I know. That is so cool. I know that feeling - writing it is one thing but taking that step and sharing it, reading it out loud to people, especially if its something painful or something you haven't totally made sense of, or is difficult to talk about, that is when it is hard.

Maria: Ya, and with my dad, he is a complicated subject. He is a complicated person in my life. No one else is as complicated as that man to be honest. But I

*was thinking about it the day before, and the day before I was like, "Should I share this in class? Would I share this in class?" And then I just knew I would share it. And when you asked, I just ***slowly raises hand****

Mel: Aww your hand just slowly went up to volunteer? So you wrote it the day before and then brought back the next day to share…

Maria: Ya we wrote it in class, and you were like okay we will share it tomorrow if you'd like to share.

Mel: Okay so you brought it home and looked at it more and thought about it and then brought it back to share.

Maria: I knew it needed a little fixing…

Mel: That was a big one for me too, to see you do that. Those moments are an important part of "Girlhood". It doesn't always fly in another class. Not everyone is comfortable sharing in that space. So why do you think you felt comfortable sharing that day?

Maria: I think it's because you made a safe space for us to talk about our feelings. Um, Ugh I'm going to get emotional right now… but um, it was a really safe space. Like I felt if I said something, I wouldn't be judged for it. I felt that people would just accept me there.

The expression of her story is a powerful memory for Maria. When she read her story in class, she sat at her desk where she always did, three seats back from the front, along the side wall, her binder open and a piece of looseleaf in her hand. The class was always a chatty and vibrant one, however, as she read on this day, the class settled in and what fell was total silence- that special quiet of absolute attention and listening. Telling her story in this way she tells me, was something that until this point she had not yet done in a school place. I began to understand that looking for a space where she felt comfortable and seen was a part of the reason that Maria signed up for "Girlhood" course in the first place. After struggling in grade 11 ELA, Maria first heard about the course as a social studies teacher read the school announcement newsletter.

Maria: Okay so it was in grade 11, and I did not like LA. I was just like I know I'm not doing an English major. It was just too hard. Who the hell even likes LA? I was more math-oriented. There's one answer in math. […] I barely passed English. I wasn't even good in social either. But I was in my social class, and um, they mentioned next year they're offering a class called "Girlhood" and it was about women empowerment, and this and that and I was like, why am I reading about old white dudes that are dead when I could be learning about feminist stuff? Let me just go do that. Let me see.

Mel: Oh amazing! Through word of mouth. So it was your teacher…who was the teacher? Do you remember?

Maria: Ummmmm I don't remember his name. He was tall and bald.

Mel: Oh okay…Mr. Smith

Maria: But he was like it was on the newsletter and he was telling us about it. And it was like you guys can do this and take this for your English.

Mel: Oh amazing. Okay. So you signed up because of that. Did you know anyone else signing up? Or did you take it as an independent woman?

Maria: I remember taking 20-1 English and it was just all Shakespeare and I was like I don't understand! This is too confusing. Why does the teacher do this to us? I was crying by the end of it so I decided to take "Girlhood" and just throw myself in there.

Mel: What was it about hearing it was a feminist class, or women's studies class that appealed to you?

Maria: I think it was more so that I don't have many …. Like, when I go to the school, it's not like we don't learn a lot about black women or black history. In social studies, there is a little bit, but not a lot of it, so I was like…you had written [in the newsletter] that it was all about women empowerment, black women, BIPOC women, that was what got me. That you had written that and LGBTQ+, you included queer and black people and all this stuff. I was like this sounds interesting and very um, progressive. I was like, I'll just do it.

Maria took the "Girlhood" course in her grade 12 year. In school, to this point, she had not been exposed to many texts, stories, ,or discussions around black people or black women. She had not

had opportunities to explore diverse stories and felt that she had been inundated with stories about "old white dudes who were dead" and who she didn't connect to or understand. For Maria, the "Girlhood" course was an open door and carried the hope that she would find stories, safety and sisterhood that she craved.

Speaking From Experience

In a later conversation, Maria refers back to her timeline and describes a presentation she did where she critically analyzed a music video and explored the racism and injustice experienced by black bodies. The students were asked to choose a video to interrogate and choose a lens that allowed them to consider issues that were relevant to them. As she speaks about it, I can remember her presentation very clearly. She stood at the front of the room and discussed police brutality, the sexualization of black women, and inequity in social systems. She used the video's images and lyrics as a jumping-off point to examine inequities that impacted black people. I remember Maria's presentation because of the way she explored the song's lyrics and video, played clips for the class and rapped along with the lyrics. Maria did not have the nervousness that some students show when they present in front of their peers for the first time. She was prepared, but there was a looseness that went with her presentation. She was not tied to her cue cards or notes. She spoke from what she knew and balanced that with what she learned in her research. She loved the song she chose, she felt the message of the song was important and she pointed out the way in which the artist critiqued the world around her. I ask Maria about this in our conversation and she tells me that she saw that project as an opportunity to educate her classmates about lived experiences that may have not been their own. She said that the project

gave her a chance to remove some ignorance from the world, and to share her view and her experience as a black woman. She had expertise not only on the song but on the issues explored within it.

I remember the students asking her a lot of questions when she was finished. I see now that these opportunities to present on topics and issues that are self-selected are really vital. I think about the near-erasure of the hierarchy within the room and the way that this was experienced by Maria. Providing students with opportunities to not only present but teach, inviting their lived experience to stand alongside professional writers, and theory was important for Maria. I wonder about the ways this activity fostered confidence for her. She tells me that this presentation gave value to the knowledge she brought into the class, giving her lived experience equal positioning to the theory she was learning.

The Complexities of Home and School Places

Maria's timeline was a long, neat, chronicle of what she recalled about the course, and her memories of the course. She sent this to me in the midst of her busy schedule, working, studying for school, and helping out her mom. As I look at her experiences, each one encircled with a cloud-like bubble, I think about why stories

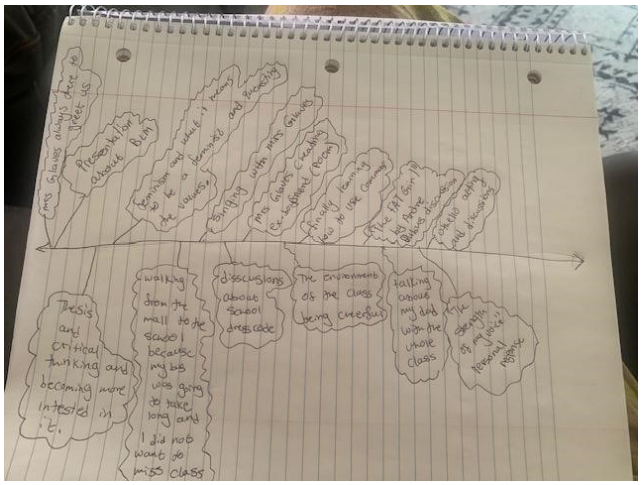

Figure 6: A picture of Maria's timeline of grade 12 "Girlhood".

of “white dudes that are dead” and school in general, did not resonate for Maria. The feelings she expressed about high school were always shared with a bit of malaise or boredom. The stories that she read, in her view, were often taught by, written by and written about, white men, and she struggled to relate to these, and did not see herself in them. She tells me she didn’t always rush to class and felt like most courses were hoops to jump through, something she had to do, not something she was necessarily interested in or passionate about. It was an obligation. She said she would give the teacher “three days” to decide what the feeling of the course would be and to decide if she liked it. Sometimes she did but, often, she felt disconnected from it.

Her family valued school, and she saw its potential to erase ignorance. However, the way she sometimes spoke about school did not suggest she necessarily saw her lived experience of school as something enlivening. This sense of boredom in how she speaks about the rest of school is not how she responded to or spoke about the “Girlhood” course, and, as our conversations progressed, I learned that this was not how she felt about school in general. When she began to tell me about her school experiences in Kenya, where she lived from 3 months old to age 7 after her family fled Somalia’s civil war, she spoke about her religious school with a light in her eye. She shared with me that her school was focused on her culture, and the community. Everyone who lived around her went to the same school. She attended with her sister, her cousins, and her aunts. She liked these schools, and these were good memories for her.

When she moved to Canada to join her parents who had been living away for a year prior in Edmonton, Maria really didn’t understand what was happening, or that she was moving away from her Kenyan home for good. She really missed her mom and thought her parents were going

to return to her. However, they moved into a large Canadian city and, a year later, Maria moved and began attending a Canadian school. Maria brings a lot of nuance to the way she thinks about and describes home and school. Her experience of moving carries with it a wider view of things, a perspective that allows her to see things that someone like me, someone who has only attended English-speaking public schools in Canada cannot see. I notice a feeling of sadness in the inflection of her voice, her facial expressions, and the pauses within these conversations, because no matter how much time passes, how many wonderful people she meets, and how fantastic her job is, there is still a yearning for another place. This yearning exists when she speaks about memories from Kenya and also within her Canadian experience; while she has had happy experiences in both places, she views her Canadian experience as a Canadian who knows a different culture.

Maria's extended family, including paternal grandparents, her aunts, and her cousins, live within 5 minutes of each other in a large urban city in Canada. She has a strong family unit around her. She remembers starting school in this city in grade 2, and not speaking the language. She tells me about sitting at a table in the room, and not having many friends. She remembers sitting with her teacher and learning her ABCs. For that first year, she had her sister and Aunt who was only a year older than her at the school, and that helped with the transition. She describes putting on all the heavy winter clothing for the first time, lugging on snow pants and boots and seeing the snow-covered ground at recess and not understanding what it was at first. She tells me that it took her about a year to catch up with her peers and to start to integrate into the school. She played basketball with the boys at recess and started to find her place. Navigating school and finding acceptance there sometimes meant moving away from her family's culture

and language, because she had to learn a new language, English, to succeed there. Both places, home and school, had different borders around them and were kept separate in a way because when the borders blurred, it caused friction or tension for her. She tells me a story about the tension created by school and home bumping against each other, when she began settling in at school and would come home speaking English. Her mother only spoke Somali and voiced concerns that Maria would lose her culture if she lost the language. Over time, Maria had to learn to keep these places separate: she spoke Somali at home and English at school, and she learned to dance between both languages seamlessly. With so much culture woven into language, this meant that for Maria, her homeplace was not taken into school, and her school place was not always taken into her home.

"Am I a feminist?": Thinking about Feminism

I ask Maria to pick where we start our next conversation, using her timeline of the course as a guide for our conversations. She jumps in immediately, telling me about the day she knew she liked the course, a day when she walked to class "in the middle of winter so that [she] wouldn't miss it". She described how she opted to walk rather than wait 30 minutes for a bus so that she would only be a few minutes late rather than missing the whole thing. As we keep talking about it, and what motivated her to come to the class, she explains that it was talking about feminism and what it means. She recalls me openly referring to myself as a feminist in the class, and that this declaration intrigued her. She tells me that just my declaration made her wonder, "Am I a feminist? What values does a feminist hold?" She did not immediately claim this title for herself, despite enrolling in a feminist course. She tells me she continually asked herself if she thought the term fit her sense of herself. Did she embody it in the same way I did?

Did it mean the same thing for her as it did for me? Before the class, this was not a term that she had ever used in the definition of herself and it invited her to consider what it meant to live in a feminist way.

It became clear that while she may not have defined herself as a feminist, the values of feminism did align with the passion she felt for fighting alongside oppressed people to establish equality. She entered the class as someone sharply aware of racial inequity but tells me that the "Girlhood" course opened her eyes to the ways that being a woman added additional complexity to this racialized social positioning. She tells me that she started to notice more the ways women "get overlooked". She feels that the course shifted her view of her agency and the way she wants to resist being positioned in society as in her words "an extension of a man" in marriage, or at work. Maria shares that within her culture there is a pressure or expectation for girls to marry quickly, sometimes right after high school, but Maria sees a different evolving path for herself after taking the course, one that doesn't necessarily resist marriage, but one that repositions it until much later in life. She tells me that the course invited her to view her mother's story differently too. In particular, she views her mother's life trajectory with more compassion; the course gave her space to untangle the threads of the story she told herself about her mother's story, and begins to consider the possibility that her mom's choices were influenced by larger system of expectations or culture, something she had not considered before. She tells me she is aware of these expectations now and sees them differently. She had always understood that they existed but now sees that these expectations are not immovable. Instead, she regards them with critical consideration.

Sharing stories

Maria tells me she often talked about the class with her Aunt; they discussed the stories we read in class and they discussed her future. She tells me that one story, "The Fat Girl" by Andre Dubus, is about a girl struggling with her body image and restrictive eating. This story resonated with Maria because similar to the protagonist, Louise, she had also struggled with her body image. Maria recalls that this story was one of the only stories that we read that was written by a male author, and how we spoke in class about the ways the female character's experience might be impacted by this male perspective. She shares that she understood the pressure the protagonist felt; the comments from family and from the world around her resonated. This was for Maria one of those stories that she devoured. She said she read it eagerly in class, took it home, read it again, analyzed it, shared the story with her aunt, and they talked about it. She went to these lengths because she wanted to understand what she thought about it, she wanted to be ready when we talked about it in class. It has been almost a year since she read that story but when I ask her about the end of the story, which ends ambiguously, she is still ready to jump in and talk about it. She shares that her reading is one that ultimately leaves the protagonist as empowered. She sees the story as a story of hope, one that contains a suggestion that disordered eating can be overcome. She tells me that it helped her to talk about that story because it gave her a way to talk about her experience. She read more deeply into this story because parts of this story were hers. She wanted to hear what her classmates thought and was surprised when she heard the story resonated with so many of them. I notice that the story lives beyond the class. She shared the story with her family, and a close Aunt and discussions blossomed from it. She tells me she still thinks about that story and what it means.

From our conversation today, Maria shares that the "Girlhood" course expanded her view and pointed her to see other stories or the depth of stories that she already knew. In the case of the story "The Fat Girl", she saw herself and her classmates critique a male author's depiction of female characters while also seeing the beauty and power in a fictional character's struggle. She saw that a story can open up a new narrative in real life, a hopeful one. In the case of developing an understanding of the language of feminism, intersectional feminism, and the patriarchy, it repositioned Maria to begin to see that the stories of her family, her mother's story, and her own, were not linear, or one thing, but rich, nuanced, diverse and complex. Each of these stories could be observed in a way that helped provide an opening into a new direction guiding her to where she stepped next in her own life.

Intersections

Over a month passed between our second and third meetings. New jobs and roles, sickness, and school have all interrupted the meetings we planned, but gave us lots to catch up on. Like last time, I notice that Maria is eager to share her thoughts on the course. She has brought her timeline and has it laid on the desk in front of her. We decide to talk about the last details on the timeline that still hadn't been discussed including one entitled "Discussions on the school dress code". When I saw this item on Maria's timeline, I made assumptions about what she would say about it: I expected one discussion but another unfolded. The discussion she alludes to is one where we talked in the "Girlhood" course about an opportunity to join in a school-wide discussion about revisions to the dress code in our large urban high school. There was a female math teacher who was concerned with how female students were dressing in

school, and she requested a meeting with the principal. The principal wanted to bring students' voices into the conversation. Because of the nature of my class, I was asked to invite students to participate. The students were immediately hesitant because they were worried that nothing would change. Many were skeptical, and felt that the invitation was performative. What began as inviting the students to a meeting, turned into an 80 minute discussion around students' stories. Student after student shared stories about the ways they felt their bodies had been observed and controlled when in school. Hand after hand went up sharing stories about being looked at by peers and teachers in ways that made them uncomfortable, of being sent home for showing a bra strap, and shoulders, and of wearing clothes that were deemed as too tight. I myself had been dress-coded in high school for showing a bra strap and had male and female administrators comment on my looks, and how I dressed. Students' stories about the shame that shrouded these experiences resonated with me. I found myself nodding along with their stories as I understood what they were saying about how it feels to have other people look at your body and hold power over it. I had assumed when she noted this on her timeline, Maria would state that she would identify the way I did:

> *Maria: Everybody was talking about how they were getting dress-coded and stuff. And I was thinking, hmm I have never really been dress-coded. I had the polar opposite experience. It made me wonder, "How come I have never been dress-coded?" And it's because of my religion. I cover up. I have been covering up since I was a child. I haven't been sexualized in that way I guess. I can't believe that anyone would sexualize a child based on what they wear. My mom always covered me up because of my religion, so no one even took a second glance at me. Like even now with the hijab and everything, sometimes, I do go out without it, and there is a whole difference in how people view me with it on and without it. When I wear the hijab, nobody cares about me. Men don't look at me. If I take it off and show my hair, and do my hair, all of a sudden men approach me. The two different experiences show the ways in which women get sexualized and [our discussion in class showed] it starts even when you're a*

child. […] I don't even think I spoke that day. I was like "Woah". All the girls were talking about how male teachers would come up to them, specifically male teachers, and tell them "you shouldn't be wearing this", and some of the students were in grade 4! […] It was just really sad. I also had discussions about this with my Aunt, we talked about this and the beauty standards […] the ways women are supposed to look, completely shaven. It just shows how these standards start when you're a kid, and go on when you grow older. Women are still striving to achieve the standard.

Mel: So then what was it about that day and that discussion that stood out to you?

Maria: I think it was that I initially felt that I couldn't relate to them. It made me wait a minute, and think about why I hadn't been dress-coded. […] children dress in all kinds of ways, it doesn't matter. I just couldn't believe that just because I covered up, people viewed me in a certain way. They viewed me differently. It ties into so many things in society. These girls in my class are talking about getting dress-coded in grade 4 and I was in grade 12 and had never had that happen…except for hats…that was the only thing.

Mel: Well, but even hats are an interesting thing to think about.

Maria: Ya…that one guy, I forgot his name. He was your professor and teacher?

Mel: Oh, Sean. Ya.

Maria: Ya he had come in that day and talked about how it was all about power and control… and it did make me think. Like we were wearing masks at school, and you can't see my face, so you're going to worry about a hat or what someone is wearing? The thing is, what I learnt about it is when I am wearing a hijab, I am looked at as a woman who should be respected. When men look at me, they don't go like "Hey yo, can I get your number?" I don't get catcalled, or anything. I don't have bad experiences with it unless someone is Islamaphobic. […] when I wear the hijab, it is different. […] The hijab has protected me from the male gaze, I guess. […] Some of my friends started to not wear their hijab and dress differently, and I thought they looked cute. And I started to wonder, why aren't my crushes liking me back? Why aren't I getting their attention? I didn't realize the power of the hijab. I didn't really start to get it until I started taking it off and I could feel the difference. I noticed a difference in myself. When I didn't wear it I pandered to the male gaze, I would say. And then when I had it on, I didn't at all.

This conversation was profound for me in the way that the same discussion settled in our memory so differently. This meeting of two unique perspectives around dress codes, reveals how vital it is for us to hear each other and to tell our stories. Maria and I were so different in how we heard it and how we felt about this experience. For me, and some other students, this day was about sharing an experience and feeling not alone. For others, it was about releasing some anger or guilt. For Maria, it was about helping her name the feelings that she experiences when she is covered, and recognizing that for her, the hijab is about empowerment and ensuring control lies within herself. For all of us, this exchange showed us something about ourselves.

Doorways to Thinking

An important aspect that Maria brings up is the environment of the class which helped students shed the embarrassment or self-consciousness that can sometimes come up when discussing difficult topics in class. Many times in our conversations she referred to the "vibe" of the class. The way the class was framed around constant dialogue in large and small group discussions, and the way we did karaoke and sang, were all important to her: *"The environment was cheerful. It helped us feel more comfortable with you as a teacher. And be more comfortable with those around us. Some of the things we would do, like singing. You don't really sing in front of people, but once we started, everybody sang and we [didn't care]. We don't feel judged in this space. We didn't feel judged or insecure in this space you created."* I asked her about this, especially because when she entered the class, she didn't enter with friends, she joined it by herself, and didn't know many of the people in the class. I asked her to talk to me about building the community and how this came to be, and she said, "*We helped each other"*. It seems such a

simple thing, everyone in the class would help when someone had to be away from the class, but she emphasized that it was important that she would not feel weird or judged when she returned after missing class. There was an acceptance that she felt in the class—an acceptance that there is life beyond the walls of the room that sometimes impacts the room. I had not considered the way that this simple act of welcoming without judgment might be so important in the space of a feminist classroom. There was never a sense that the class was not rigorous or that students would not complete the work, but that the pace of when and how the work got completed might shift, and that the students saw each other and me as the teacher as equals. She also tells me that she considered the ways that I responded to questions important to her. She noticed that when someone asked questions, they were never met with "no, you're wrong", but the idea offered was built upon and encouraged. Maria makes me aware that the class viewed questions and discussions as doorways that opened up more thinking. She tells me that in the past when she hears a finite answer like no, she tells herself she will "never ever answer a question again". It makes me think about some of her indifference around school that she had spoken about earlier in our meetings. I begin to recognize that her attitude about school indicates a frustration with her experience in school seeming rigid, box-like or contained. Maria valued learning as not linear, but more winding and open; she sees it as a series of opening doors. She sees it as a process that happens within a community, where each member is there to help.

As she speaks about this, it makes me think about an "open- mic" poetry reading exercise we did in one semester in our school cafe, drinking hot cocoa together. I told Maria about it. The students were invited to share a poem they had been working on in a portfolio and to listen to each other's stories. The microphones weren't working, so we had to be quiet while one by one

members of the class read their piece. We sat together in a circle and students shared a poem about an issue that they wanted to explore. The options for topics were open, and students were given the freedom to look into something that they were curious about. One former “Girlhood” student, Mila [name has been changed], chose to research and write about what life is like for the children of parents with cancer. Mila honored me by asking me to read hers aloud for her. She wanted it to be read, but she was worried that she wouldn’t be able to get through it without crying; it was about her mother, who had passed away a few months before. It was beautiful and it was difficult to read. I could feel the importance of what she had written, and I was conscious of making sure my voice didn’t shake. I wanted her words to be heard. Louder than the rustling of the cafe workers behind me as they shoveled ice into cups. Louder than my own memories of loss as they bubbled up as I read.

The ways other students witnessed her poem, sitting with her in a circle, is a moment I will never forget. I saw the emotion of everyone who listened and felt the heaviness of what she was saying, and what she needed to say. After my reading finished, almost every student responded to her words: slowly around the circle, they acknowledged her grief and shared some of theirs. The students in the class noticed her pain, her grief, and her eloquence, and they took it in. I took it in too. After class I watched the students approach her and envelop her in hugs and say words of comfort and empathy. It reminds me of Maria sharing her 100-word poem and being approached by a classmate who acknowledged what she was saying. Maria believes the “Girlhood” course feels different than other classes because there is space for stories to be shared, noticed and received, carefully.

As our final conversation wound down, Maria told me about her Personal Response called “The Strength of My Voice”. In class, students kept a thought book writing portfolio in which students consider a variety of prompts and then respond to them in any way that worked for them. Over the months we were together, we looked at examples of “professional” writing, alongside student writing, and my own writing, and students were encouraged to notice the ways that these writers wrote. The activity is meant to provide students with practice writing and the strategies we learn in the curriculum to enhance voice; but it was also intended to be an exercise in considering their own stories. For this particular response, Maria wrote about a difficult experience in her childhood. As we begin to discuss it, I wonder if she even wants to speak about this now, and assure her she doesn’t have to. She wants to discuss it, she tells me, but doesn’t want me to include details about what happened here in this work. What is important to share, is what the act of writing about it did for her, and why it stood out for her in the course. When I ask her about how she came to write about this experience, she tells me it came up after reading bell hooks in class and how hooks’ reinforcement of the idea that sisterhood is necessary and that our stories help lift us up:

> *Maria: bell hooks talked about a woman’s voice and how like a lot of women help other women, and help strengthen their voice and how they support them. It’s that kind of community and stuff. I felt like through my experiences with watching different shows and talking to my Aunt, they kind of combined my voice and helped echo it.*
>
> *Mel: Ohhh okay so in reading bell hooks you started to see how they echoed your voice, and in echoing your voice…*
>
> *Maria: they amplified it. Ya. […] What got me to write it down on paper the first time was bell hooks.*

Having the opportunity to explore hooks' work made Maria think about her own experience in a new way, illuminating how just listening to other women's experiences, advice and stories empowered her. She began to see the connection between how female support and story, TV shows she watched, conversations with her Aunt, "echoed her story" and made her see that they gave her the courage to "amplify" her own voice. Her written response recounted her experience and then ended with her memory of talking to her mom about what had happened, and getting some help. I ask Maria to tell me about what writing the experience down did for her. She tells me that it helped give her perspective on this difficult moment in her life and she sees it differently. For a long time, she felt haunted by the trauma she experienced. She has come to see the writing as a way of "protecting herself" and she calls it "healing" and "some sort of therapy". This is important because Maria tells me she has made the decision alongside her mom to not discuss this difficult experience unless it benefits her. She feels that there is no point in telling other people unless it does. These words stay with me and make me think of Mila and others who chose to tell their stories in class.

I ask Maria how writing this benefitted her and she tells me that writing about it gives her clarity to see women's presence and stories around her in a way she hadn't considered before; she sees how other women give her strength, how in speaking with her mother lifted some of the burdens of guilt she felt, and how writing about the experience, later on, allowed her to heal lingering feelings of blame, shedding even more weight. It takes a sense of safety to share in this way, and I can see that now. She felt safe to share and safe to unburden herself of some of these feelings. I see the threads connecting Maria's experience to my memory of Mila.

This memory was the last experience that Maria wrote on her timeline and is the topic she discussed at the greatest length in our meetings. She built up to talking about it, saving it until we again felt comfortable with each other in this new research context rather than within a class. I leave this meeting thinking about how bell hooks invited Maria in, and encouraged her to examine critically the relationships in her life; Maria engaged in critical thought that made space for more healing.

Chapter Five: Inquiring into my experiences with Maria and Alison: Narrative Threads

Coming closer to understanding the impact of "Girlhood" has been like unknotting a tangled ball of yarn, following a meandering pathway, trying to trace it as it breaks off in different directions, blending into other sections of yarn around it. Each time I revisited our field texts and reread the co-composed narrative accounts, the stories within them shifted, showing me something different. I am hopeful that you have noticed things too, and can't help but wonder what you see.

It has been difficult to know how to present what lifts up in this research especially because I wanted to resist presenting this section as traditional research "findings", knowing that word feels too absolute and too complete to represent the ongoing, unfolding nature of what I discuss here. In this chapter, I avoid a tone that is too certain, as I offer stories that will continue to grow, unfold, and evolve each time this thesis is read or thought about down the road. We are all engaged in a continual composing of our lives; Caine et al. (2022) helped point me to Maxine Greene's idea that "We are what we are not yet" (Greene as cited in Caine et al., p. 45). And so what follows is a story too, a story that follows some of the threads noticed in this research.

These are some of the glowing fibres of my research that offer a glimpse into the course.

Family as the first thread

It is important to begin, I think, by honouring the first chains of crochet, the feminist experiences that were already in the midst when the course began. The first strands of feminism for myself, Alison, and Maria, were already crocheted into our lives before we entered the class. This is an important realization for me—that the course was not the beginning, but a place where existing ideas were refined, nurtured, developed, and deepened. This familial feminism shaped the course and, over time, the course also shaped our understanding of these family experiences as well. My grandma told me stories that helped me understand and value the importance of education. Alison carried into the course her relationship with her mom, and also the graduate work of her father. She carried in family experiences that celebrated her power as a young woman, and also a family dynamic that encouraged strong female relationships. Maria carried in strong female bonds with her mother and aunt, who were already engaging her in discussions and feminist critique, even if it was not necessarily named this. She carried in her family's awareness of difference and nuance, their support of education and an understanding that curiosity and learning were powerful when they were engaged in a way that was open and winding. I think "Girlhood" honoured these familial connections, and encouraged Alison and Maria to notice them, highlight them, and retrace them. The course took the stories of their lives and gave them room to be considered in new ways.

I emphasize that feminism and feminist courses are strengthened by families. Alison and Maria's families, as well as my own, supported the course and all its loops forward in several ways. First, in the way they are loving and supportive, encouraging dialogue, critique, female

bonds and empowerment through education. Their families did not impede or question their interest in the course, as some parents have done; instead of blocking opportunities for feminist thinking, their families were supportive of their enrollment in the class. Their support nurtures the bravery required to sign up. Their families also engaged with the course material and became participants in feminist thinking as well. Alison shared that she talked to her mom about the class, and even invited her mom into the class itself, where she became a part of the fabric of the course. Maria and her Aunt engaged with the stories in the course, and she came home and shared stories with her Aunt so they could speak and think about them. I think this familial support needs to be recognized- not only for the space it created for learning to happen, but also for nurturing this learning and helping to erase boundaries that are sometimes present between school places and family places.

Feminist language and concepts as a second thread

Because feminism was already in motion, already being lived in their families, I think "Girlhood" helped to reinforce this, by strengthening and deepening their understanding of feminist language and concepts. Learning specific terminology and learning to name the world they lived in, was something that Alison and Maria both mentioned and valued. Learning feminist language helped refine their understanding of their lived experiences, helping them begin to loop in new understandings of themselves and their places in the world. Alison spoke about how learning the terms helped her to notice the world differently, to widen her perspective beyond her own experiences and begin to notice inequalities that she had previously not recognized:

> *The first thing I put down on my timeline was the intro to "Girlhood" and what the terminology and concepts were. Things like stereotypes, archetypes, relationships, and media and I remember learning about the waves of feminism, and the Bechdel test, which then we went on and looked at when we looked at clips of movies and stuff. So that was the first thing. Like what is this, what are we going to look at? That terminology and those concepts were like stuff I have always remembered and carried with me. It's not like algebra where you remember it for a test and are then like, ok, bye. All those terms and concepts were so helpful to know [...] I was just like, I had no idea...*

She spoke about how learning these terms helped her see things in the world that she had previously missed. She talked about our discussions about Serena Williams, and the way that encountering and learning about this new language helped her become more aware of certain aspects of the media, and helped "prepare" her to engage in critique beyond the course and in the subsequent chapters of her life.

Maria spoke about learning about the work of bell hooks, and how this had a profound impact on her. Engaging in conversations around feminism, and beginning to understand what the term "feminist" means, helped Maria shape a clearer understanding of her own life and perspective. She recalls our conversation in class about dress codes and power, and this helped her see the systems — the dominant cultural, social, and institutional narratives — around her in different ways and begin to ask questions about the boundaries that surround each of us. I see now that the course was something that helped strengthen students' understanding of the world; the language and ideas explored in the course helped students make connections that ultimately reinforced their ability to engage in critical thinking.

By retracing my stories of first coming to understand this language in my 20s during my undergraduate degree, I was able to see more clearly, the potential Alison and Maria carried with them as a result of learning these things in their teens; my renewed understanding of feminism

made visible that both Alison and Maria left high school with this knowledge already, carrying with them a sharper and more nuanced view of the worlds they entered beyond the course.

Boxes, boundaries and bravery: new narratives in school as a third thread

This research has helped me understand that institutional schooling tends to happen in boxes. There are boundaries around everything: the grade students are in, the units of study explored, the books read, the questions about books and themes we are supposed to see, the way we wrote our essays or solved our math, and even the report cards tracing progress are rectangular. Think about your school and the shape it was; think about the ways classrooms looked. Were your classrooms and schools squares and rectangles like mine were? I am beginning to understand the ways these shapes echo the institutional borders around what and how we know. These borders are strong and I think now about how they have impacted me. I think about the ways these have shifted what I see and how I see.

My inquiry with Alison and Maria into our experiences shows me that when you're surrounded by boxes, and living in boxes, it can be difficult to unlearn the boundaries outlined by them. It is difficult to move in a way that is contrary to the boundaries. It is difficult to do this and it takes bravery to do this. It takes bravery to enrol in a feminist class; it takes bravery to create and sustain the class; it takes bravery to seek and celebrate sisterhood; it takes bravery to write personally and openly and be vulnerable in the class. It is courageous to tell a story, to show emotion, to reveal hurt, joy, or shame; it is difficult to reveal authentic and truthful experiences. Telling or retelling a story, or one's family stories, in a different way, is a risk because it is never clear what will be found there. It is to be in a liminal space, to be uncertain and to face the abyss of uncertainty, of not knowing. To explore and challenge boundaries, to

resist the taken-for-granted requires a certain amount of bravery from families, students, teachers, departments, and schools. But this bravery, to challenge or push against boundaries, makes wonderful things possible, and did impact Maria, Alison, and me.

Alison, Maria, and I all recalled moments in our education where space was made to take our home stories to a school place. I am beginning to now see the power this can have in creating new narratives of institutional schooling. Both Alison and Maria emphasized the uniqueness of the "Girlhood" course and the room it made for stories, discussion, movement, female friendship, and playfulness, for becoming otherwise as Maxine Greene (1995) would have it. Both participants recalled the buzzing of the classroom, seeing it as a space that moved, was alive, sometimes loud and chaotic, and filled with laughter. I had ignored it in my first few interim texts and my first few conversations with them, but again and again, both continued to return to the movement, the vibes, the fun, the different feeling of the course. bell hooks (2014) describes how this loudness is often resisted because it pushes against the quiet, compliant order of 'traditional' obedient classroom spaces. I am beginning to see now that this laughter and joy of dressing up in costumes, making time for singing, making space for dancing, making space for poetry readings, laughter and tears, happiness and sadness, cannot be disregarded. The presence of expressed emotion in the "Girlhood" course and that it was encouraged to take up space was something that each participant brought up multiple times. Alison, and her friend, Sara, talked about this in the first iterations of the course. Maria, who took the course so much later, noticed that this impacted everyone's experience. While texts, topics, and current events we covered changed, the invitation for emotion and creativity stayed consistent.

The feeling of the space created through opportunities to explore creatively is equally important to the texts and concepts that we studied. It has been important for me to learn that the

approach we take to studying texts and language, and the space we make for play is equally important. Hidden within these moments of joy are opportunities for exploration and expanding our thinking; this "vibe" or energy within the course, inspired them to keep this feminist energy flowing beyond the class. Movement, evolution and adaptation both within the course, and in ourselves, is an important loop within the fabric of the course.

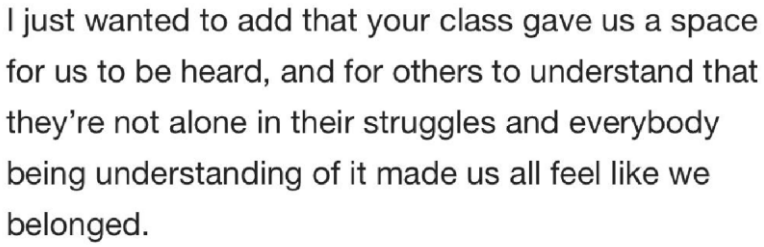

Figure 7: A passage written by Maria about the course.

This class stood out to each of us because it was different from other classes, and showed me, Alison and Maria a new story of school. Experiencing a different way of being in school encouraged Alison, Maria and myself to carry that experience and loop it into new places beyond high school. Alison and her friend Sara both explained that the course caused them to seek out opportunities to engage in this type of space again. When professional development offered in my school board wasn't providing me with space to explore feminist pedagogy in ways I desired, I enrolled in graduate school so that I could study the course, learn more and begin creating new stories. I think it is worth paying attention to this "seeking" — it is powerful that the course has encouraged us to search for these spaces, and I feel proud that we carry the course forward in this way. However, I also think this need to search for these types of spaces also points to a lack of opportunity for these types of classes or at least, less opportunity for them in schools. It makes me wonder what might happen if more of these spaces existed.

When I sent an early draft of this section to Maria and Alison for their responses, Maria immediately responded and asked me to add a specific line. I included her words as she wrote

them in Figure 7 to emphasize her voice. Maria points to “Girlhood” as a unique space in the school where she felt safe and belonging. She felt this class contained community and the embodied moments shared in it are important in the way that they connected us and removed barriers between us, and removed judgment. These moments brought us closer together. Alison and Maria shared that they felt their stories hadn’t been given much room in school until this course. Their excitement to be in a space like this in school for the first time emboldened them to carry their knowledge forward, in different ways into the next worlds they entered, whether that be school, work, or relationships.

The rareness of this class makes me return to the picture of a single row of crochet, like the one I wrote about earlier, where I made a long, single chain with my Grandma. There is, of course, meaning in this row, it is strong and has a purpose: it is the necessary first step. Crochet is, however, made stronger when additional rows are stitched in. I wonder about the “Girlhood” course, and how students begin looking into their rows of stories, unravelling them, looping in new stitches and beginning again. I wonder now what might happen to those crocheted stories, brimming with potential, if more spaces or classes in school invited them in. I think this is something that invites more wondering and conversation. How might we create more spaces in schools to do this? How do we make not only more classes about feminism but more classes that are feminist in their approach, in the ways they live and breathe? I do believe that the class is powerful and filled with potential; I also am now wondering about all the possibilities that might unfold if students were given more spaces in school to add more stitches in.

Linking personal and social: A fourth thread

Alison and Maria spoke about the opportunities they were given in the "Girlhood" course to write and tell their personal stories, or stories about their friendships or families. It was this freedom to explore their personal experiences that invited them to also turn their attention to the larger social systems around them as well as their places within these. Alison and Maria shared that they felt supported in this act of storytelling, and they felt "good at it". These storied experiences, open-ended, looping, and explorative, resonated and created bonds between all of us who told or heard them. I see the way Maria's experience sharing her 100-word story with the class or her experience writing a personal story she hadn't yet written about in this way, and notice the way these meant something to her. It meant something to her that her peers approached her after she read her story, letting her know that her story resonated with them. It meant something to her to look at an incident in her life that was difficult and see that story changing. I see this in my story of reading Mila's poem, as it illuminates the way we all saw our own grief in her story before enveloping her with love. I see the luminescence of Alison's stories of personal writing, telling others like her friend Sara to join the class so she could experience it too. I see how valuable it was for students to engage in storytelling with curiosity and no pretense that anything would be "found there". In this freedom, students could reflect and ideas began to take shape. Sometimes, healing took shape.

The simple act of making room for these stories, and looking at them, as another narrative under study, stands out to me now. I recognize that it may not be unique to write about our lives in school; however, it is unique to make room for "in the midst" stories in school. It rises up for me that writing and considering stories that might not have a "theme" or "answer"

was valued by all three of us. I notice that inviting stories that were in the midst, not yet done — writing them, sharing them and listening to them —went beyond the border of grading. By "border" of grading, I mean the way writing in ELA classrooms is sometimes limited to existing as a means to a grade. Sometimes writing tasks are viewed as assignments, and their value is not necessarily determined by their potential for exploration, but in the grade assigned to them. It sounds simple, but this type of writing and the space it was in *was* unique because it became more than an assessment. It opened up the willingness of students to write, the way that we treated the writing as explorative, conversational, evolving, and worth sharing. It opened up thinking about the connection between personal stories and the ways these stories were influenced by, and woven into, larger social systems. The stories helped all of us shape ourselves. In writing, reading, and listening to stories, we create new stories. These stories of ourselves meant something to us, and this is evident in the way the writing echoes in our research conversations; not only do we remember them, we still think about them, keep them, and protect them. I saw this in the way Maria could send me a picture of her 100-word story, months after the course was finished, still thinking about her relationship with her dad, or the way that her critical analysis of a song helped her think about her places as a black Muslim woman in Canada.
I saw this in the way Alison recalled stories shared in the class about female bonds and how these resonated for her, validating her own friendships and the ways she began to examine her mom's stories differently, and the ways these impacted her own journey in the world.

When I look over our experiences represented in this thesis, Alison's, Maria's and my own, I return to stories about classes that stood out to us. My university women's studies classes were the first time when I inquired into personal experiences in school. It was my first real

sustained glimpse into story in this way, and the first time I was invited and encouraged to look at the relationship between stories of myself, my classmates and the people and characters we read about. It was one of the first times I became aware of the artistry of stories and how these were compositions of life, and could be changed. My research helped me listen to the way this thread still echoes in Alison and Maria's experiences too.

Reflections of personal, practical, and social justifications: Conversations to join

Personal

This research has helped me to see the value in creating and protecting feminist spaces where stories can be shared. I have come to more deeply understand the ways that stories impact those who hear them, feel them, and relate to them; stories inspire students to keep weaving these stories forward, making changes, and making their life-tapestries stronger. When I began this graduate work, I carried a lot of anxiety about the course and lacked confidence about what it did, if anything at all. This research has helped me grow more confident in understanding what the course does and helped me recognize the protective space it creates for critical thought, emotions, movement, self-knowledge and connection. I see my role in creating this environment more clearly now, and think about the importance of this role in feminist classrooms. In considering the stories looped into the course, pulling the threads and retracing them, I have began to re-story not only the course, but myself.

The course loops forward in my experiences today and it is being looped forward now, as I type on a rainy afternoon, and will be carried into the future too, when you read this. The course

spurred me to the feminist act of writing this thesis and possibly, it invited you into the feminist act of reading it. The course challenged a story that other people told me, and that I admittedly told myself: that I should be content with teaching the course and being a wife and mom, and didn't need to go back to school. This narrative inquiry has shown me that feminism means continually learning, growing, evolving, and I need to ensure that I keep learning, growing and evolving too. Telling stories of the course with two other women has been a powerful and enriching experience, and one I am deeply grateful for.

One of the most profound realizations I have had is that the story of the course began long before I started teaching it. It humbles me and makes me proud to now see that there are many experiences that shaped the course. Alison, Maria and I brought many stories in with us, and so did all of the other people who entered the room. These stories and experiences were crocheted together, and helped create a place for us to walk alongside each other and share some of these in a way that changed how we saw the world and ourselves. I see now how exploring these experiences held open space for us to know our stories differently.

Practical

Inviting all aspects of ourselves into school spaces creates an environment where students feel safe exploring and practicing feminist language and activism through writing. Putting stories—stories that are intended to be explorative and open, and move beyond the border of grading—at the centre of the course, stories that move beyond assessment, stories that are for now and incomplete, and inviting students to read, listen, share, tell and retell them, offers everyone in the room the opportunity to explore and to know themselves and the world around them, more deeply. Being comfortable with thinking about the story as alive, in the midst, helps

prepare students and teachers to engage in feminism as their life journeys continue, and helps them not only seek out spaces that will help them to continue to share their stories but see the potential of how all stories, when told and retold, have the capacity to help change ourselves, our families and our society and tell a different story of what institutional schooling can look and feel like. Creating more feminist courses, or courses that are feminist in their approach has great transformative potential.

A willingness to adapt and to encourage the evolution of the course, and school culture is central to offering feminist courses in high school. The course changed each year it was taught: as I changed, the course changed; as students changed, the course changed; as the world changed, the course changed. These changes in the course then impacted all of us in the course and began to have ripples outside of the course. The threads of the courses were stitched outward, and got wider, moving into the hallways of the school into conversations with peers, or colleagues, and from there carried out of the buildings, into homes and families, and then into the world. This kind of course makes room for social justice action to grow. Seeing that the course continues to grow beyond me, and lives in the hands of all of us who enter the room, helps me also see the transformative potential of creating more feminist spaces in schools.

Theoretical

Feminist movements will continue to enact change as long as stories can be told and feminist pedagogy is enacted. It will take courage for teachers and students to create and exist and celebrate feminist spaces in schools. bell hooks envisioned school places which offered students the opportunity to explore new language and concepts, earlier in their formal education. “Girlhood” created a space in a public Canadian high school to do this. It introduced students to

feminist language, and it also made room for practicing the art of personal story—both in telling and witnessing these stories—which helped all of us discover and nurture feminism's possibility. Pulling threads of stories and looking at them in new ways helped us begin to crochet new rows that strengthened our complex, nuanced and evolving understanding of our place in the world. I think of this awareness as a form of activism that helps move us toward other forms of activism.

Narrative Inquiry helped me see that "Girlhood" continues to live. It lived in the family stories that came before it, it lives now, and it will continue to live. It lives with Alison and Maria as they live their lives and it lives with me. "Girlhood" continues to impact our stories of ourselves. Narrative Inquiry helped me see the way that all of us, Maria, Alison, myself, and now you, continue to weave our stories forward. Feminist courses like "Girlhood" help us to see our stories in new ways, and help us connect our personal stories to the larger social stories that impact these stories; these connections create space for action, growth, and change.

As life continues and we take a feminist course, or we read a book, or a thesis, these experiences invite us to stop and pull the threads of our own storied experiences; they then invite us to take up the crochet hook, and begin to restitch our stories of ourselves, creating something new. As I finish typing this thesis, I am thinking of the first chain of crochet I made at my grandma's house, the one that was long enough to stretch from her basement up to the top floor. I notice how that single chain has continued forward, the memory of it appearing in the blankets I made years later; I think of the people to whom I gave those blankets, the homes those stitches sit in, the places those first stitches have gone, on and on, stretching out to the horizon.

As I finish typing this thesis, I keep thinking about my grandma's stories and the ways they are crocheted into my life. For as long as I can remember, she and I would sit at her small

kitchen table which was nestled in her tiny kitchen, and we would drink tea and eat her fresh-baked cookies and butter tarts, or the popcorn she'd make us in a cast- iron pot. I think of these conversations and the peppermints she kept out for us in a honey pot on the table. I think of her voice and her hands around her tea cup as she would tell her stories to me. This was a special time which gave me space to listen to her stories of experience. I remember our conversations often drifting back to when she finished grade eight and was told by her parents she wouldn't be able to go to high school. She liked school, and wanted to keep learning; when she found out that she couldn't go, and would instead have to move away from home to work, she cried. Even 80 years after it happened, when she would talk about this story, her blue eyes conveyed her profound sadness at losing the chance to go to school.

I leave this thesis now seeing how this story is a part of my stories. My research has helped me trace the ways my grandma has been stitched into my school experiences. Her story is woven into my high school and university graduation; it is stitched into my teaching career, in "Girlhood", and is with me now in this thesis, helping me make sense of what I have learned over the past three years. I think of the ways that my grandma is looped into all of these experiences and how each one connects back to her. I feel grateful for the ways she has been present in my stories, stitched into school experiences and places she never thought she would enter into, but making my experiences there possible. I hope that she sees this too.

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Appendix A Girlhood Course Syllabus

The course assessment and evaluation evolved from year to year, and weightings were determined by the department; I have included a sample list of assessments and activities to give a sense of some of the tasks we explored. As determined by the department, and to allow students to practice for provincially mandated standardized exams, students in both grade levels also wrote reading tests that assessed their understanding of terminology, concepts and reading comprehension; because these courses were "split" classes which combined academic streams, the assignments were at times modified/adjusted to meet the curricular requirements outlined in each respective stream.

Grade 11

- ★ **Short Story Critical/Literary Essay-** the first attempt at critical writing and analysis
- ★ **Final Critical/Literary Essay Paper-** the culmination of their understanding of critical writing; usually on the novel or film
- ★ **Personal Response Writing**
  - **Thought book** - students respond to visuals, quotes, ideas, art, questions; video clips; they engaged in writing 2-3 times per week; I immediately responded to students work via verbal, written or recorded feedback; students sometimes shared excerpts of this work with others; picture this work as a portfolio building over time
  - **Personal Response Final Draf**t - students selected one piece from their larger body of work to take through the entire writing process all the way to editing/polishing
- ★ **Novel Study**- ongoing, students selected novels from a list based on their interest; they met with each other and me over several weeks, completing tasks weekly
- ★ **Poetry Research-Creation Project**- students wrote and presented poetry on a social justice issue
- ★ **Phenomenal Woman Project-** students interviewed and/or research and then presented on a significant woman or girl in their life or in culture

Grade 12

- ★ **Critical Theory Research Projec**t- this is where students first begin to famililarize themselves with the language of critical theory; they select a music video, film or ad campaign and critically analyze the text through a critical lens; their analysis is shared with the class and discussed at length
- ★ **Short Story Essay**- the first attempt at critical writing and analysis on a literary text, refining and polishing analysis skills
- ★ **Thoughtbook Writing Portfolio-** similar format to the process outlined in grade 11; the prompts addressed topics, current events and theoretical ideas explored in the lessons each week; sharing excerpts with eachother
  and receiving prompt feedback from me and eachother was an important part of this work
- ★ **Novel Study-** the novel study is ongoing and framed as a culminating task; students select a novel based on their interest and form small groups; they work through module tasks each week independently, and also met with their group members to discuss the work
- ★ **Seminar**- the students engage in a full seminar discussion of the novel, raising critical questions and deepening their understanding of the work; this is an important step before they wrote their Independant Culminating research Paper
- ★ **Independant Culminating Research Paper-** the culmination of their understanding of critical theory; synthesis of research, critical theory, seminar discussion, and novel

This is a list of some of the works explored in the course. Not all of these were covered every semester, but several were studied in some combination over the seven years of the class. I have chosen to include novels, short stories, and poets here for the purposes of giving a sense of the literature studied in the course, since these are the types of texts that appeared in my conversations with Alison and Maria; we also studied Macbeth and Othello, visual texts, non-fiction and scholarly pieces, as well as feature-length and short films.

Novels:

The Handmaid's Tale - Margaret Atwood
Medicine Walk - Richard Wagamese
The Nightingale - Kristin Hannah
Red at the Bone - Jacquline Woodson
The Awakening - Kate Chopin
*The Fire Keeper's Daughte*r - Angeline Boulley
American Dirt - Jeanine Cummins
Wild - Sheryl Strayed
The Glass Castle - Jeannette Walls
We Should All Be Feminists - Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie
A Thousand Splendid Suns - Khaled Hosseini
Normal People - Sally Rooney
feminist theory: from margin to centre - bell hooks

Short Stories:

"The Embassy" - Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie
"Country Lovers"- Nadine Gordimer
"Once Upon a Time" - Nadine Gordimer
"Borders" - Thomas King
"A Sorrowful Woman" - Gail Godwin
"Desiree's Baby"- Kate Chopin
"The Dinner Party" - Mona Gardner
"The Fat Girl" - Andre Dubus
"Boys and Girls" - Alice Munro
"The Lottery" - Shirley Jackson

Poetry from the anthologies of:

Maya Angelou
Audre Lorde
Tyler Pennock
Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm
rupi kaur
Amanda Gorman
Rudy Francisco
Olivia Gatwood
Sylvia Plath
Warsane Shire
Edna St. Vincent Millay
Jordan Abel

Appendix B General Information Letter

A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of a Feminist High School ELA Course

What is this Research Study?

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study. I want to understand the experiences of former students who participated in the Girlhood ELA courses in a local High School. I want to listen to your stories about the course. Your participation will help me understand the impact of the course on your life.

Who is the Researcher and what is the purpose of this study?

My name is Melanie Glaves, and I will be working alongside my supervisor, Dr. Sean Lessard. The purpose of this study is to understand the ways Feminist ELA courses in public high schools impact students. The results of this study will be used for my Master's thesis.

What is Narrative Inquiry?

Narrative Inquiry recognizes that people's lives and stories are important. I will listen to, learn from, and reflect on how your stories teach me and others about the impact of Feminist ELA courses in high schools. Narrative Inquiry uses field notes, sharing of artifacts, photos, researcher journals, writing and work samples and one-on-one or group conversations to co-construct a narrative that captures a specific experience. Your stories will help offer important insight into the course.

How do I participate?

If you agree to participate in the study, you will first be given a letter providing more detail about the study, and a consent form to sign. My study will take place when and where it is convenient for you. We may have conversations together in places in the community, on the phone, over email or over Zoom. We will meet several times to discuss your experiences with the course. After our initial meeting, where I will make notes and record our conversations (if you agree to this), from the field

texts (notes, recordings, photos, artifacts), I will begin constructing Interim Research texts that I will share with you to ensure my understanding of your experience is accurate. Each conversation will be 30-90 minutes, depending on your schedule, and what you would like to talk about. When the study is complete I will write a Narrative Account of your experience, which will be included in my Master's thesis.

Benefits

Potential bene ts included the opportunity to think more about your experiences in a Feminist ELA course and how this has and will continue to impact your life beyond high school.

Risks

No foreseeable risks.

What about my privacy?

Your privacy will be respected. I will not share real names or the school's name in our writing. What you tell me during our conversations will only be recorded if you agree with this. Audio recordings will be encrypted and not uploaded to iCloud. I will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants. I will keep the information you tell or give me private and will remove your name or identifying information from files. Only the University of Alberta will have access to field texts (data). I will destroy any personal information given when I finish the final Narrative Account.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any point until December 30, 2022.

Contact Information

Principal Investigator: Melanie Glaves, Master's student, Secondary Education Department,
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Email:

Supervisor: Sean Lessard, Professor, Secondary Education Department,
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Email: Phone:

Appendix C Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: *A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of a Feminist High School ELA Course*

Contact Information

Principal Investigator: Melanie Glaves, Master's student, Secondary Education Department,
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Email:

Supervisor: Sean Lessard, Professor, Secondary Education Department,
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Email:
Phone:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you take part, a member of the study team is available to explain the project and you are free to ask any questions about anything you do not understand. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being invited to take part in this study because I want to understand the experiences of former students who participated in the Girlhood ELA courses in a local High School. I want to listen to your stories about the course. Your participation will help me better understand the impact of the course on the people in the class community.

What is the reason for doing the study?

Feminist courses tend to be taken at the university level, and you are someone who has participated in such a course in high school. The purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which Feminist ELA courses in public high schools impact students. The results of this study will be used for Melanie Glaves' Master's thesis.

What will I be asked to do?

You are being invited to take part in Narrative Inquiry Research. Narrative Inquiry recognizes that people's lives and stories are important. We will meet in person and/or over zoom, and I will listen to, learn from, and reflect on how your stories teach me and others about the impact of Feminist ELA courses in high schools. Narrative Inquiry uses field notes, sharing of artifacts, photos, researcher journals, writing and work samples and one-on-one or group conversations to co-construct a narrative that captures a specific experience. Your stories will help offer important insight into the course.

We will begin our research together by having 3 one-on-one conversations where we will talk about your school experiences leading up to the course, the course itself, and beyond the course. These individual discussions will last between 30 and 90 minutes in length, depending on what you have to say and will take place either in person (face-to-face) or virtually (zoom, skype, google meets). If we meet in person, you can select where we meet and all Covid-19 protocols will be in place including masking and distancing. If we meet virtually, you have the option to turn off your camera at any time.

We will use artifacts, photos, researcher journals, writing and work samples to direct our conversations. The conversation will be recorded and transcribed, before being turned into an interim text that I will share with you. You can make changes or revisions to this as you see fit and I will adjust the account to reflect your revisions. Before submitting the completed narrative account, I will provide you with a copy for you to recommend any changes or revisions.

What are the risks and discomforts?

You are unlikely to experience risks or discomforts by taking part in this research. It is not possible to know all of the risks that may happen in a study, but we have taken all reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to you.

COVID-19 Related Risks: Because our discussions and some interviews may take place in person, we will adhere to all public health guidelines currently in place including masking and distancing where necessary. Please feel free to discuss protocols with me prior to taking part in the project.

What are the benefits to me?

There may not be any direct benefit to you for participating in this research. However, you may appreciate the opportunity to think more about your experiences in a Feminist ELA course and how

this has and will continue to impact your life beyond high school. You will also receive a written document summarizing your narrative account, which you can keep for your personal archive.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any point until December 30, 2022. After that point, we cannot remove you from the study because the data will have been analyzed in full. To withdraw from the study please contact Melanie Glaves or her supervisor Sean Lessard.

Even if you remain in the research study, you may choose to withdraw some or all of your responses. Interim account drafts will be shared with you and you will have two weeks to review the contents and remove, change, or withdraw anything that you like. The final Narrative Account will be shared with you and, likewise, you will have two weeks to remove or change any sections you wish. We will be unable to withdraw data after December 30, 2022, because by that time data analysis will be complete.

Will I be paid to be in the research?

There will be no payment for interviews.

Will my information be kept private?

During this study, we will do everything we can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private. No information relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside the researcher's office or published by the researchers unless you give us your express permission. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name so we cannot guarantee absolute privacy. However, we will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private. For interviews, your name will not be used. We will use an alternate name. You can choose a name yourself at the end of this form or we can choose a name for you. If you would like to use your real name, please discuss this with the researchers and indicate this on the form at the end of this document. Again, we will not use your name unless you ask.

Recordings of our conversations will be encrypted and not uploaded to iCloud or any other platform. Electronic data will be stored on a secure Google drive at the University of Alberta during analysis. When not in use, paper copies of data will be kept in locked cabinets. The information from this study will be seen only by members of the research group. On occasion, this data will need to be checked for accuracy. For this reason, your data, including your name, may also be looked at by people from the Research Ethics Board or by the University of Alberta auditors.

What will happen to the information or data that I provide?

The information you provide will form part of Melanie Glaves' Master's thesis in Secondary Education. The published thesis may be made available to the public. What you say may also be used as part of public or academic presentations, in news or academic publications, as well as for examples during teaching. At no point will you be identified in this work. However, please understand that the *Girlhood* course is unique to your high school and identifiable, so others may become aware of the community we are talking about. If you create a timeline or drawing that guides our conversation, this will be photographed, and then saved on a secure computer.

After the study is done, we will store your data for a minimum of 5 years. Any physical papers and transcripts will be stored in locked cabinets. These papers will be securely shredded 5 years after the research is complete. Encrypted electronic data will be stored on a secure University of Alberta Google drive. The data (audio recordings, eld notes, interim texts) will be stored for at least 5 years but may be kept longer for future research. Your name will never be associated with any electronic data. Your data may be linked to other data for research purposes only to increase the usefulness of the data. Any researcher who wants to use this data in the future must have the new project reviewed by an ethics board.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact Melanie Glaves or her supervisor Sean Lessard.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office and quote Ethics ID: xxxxxxxxxxx. This office is independent of the study investigators.

How do I indicate my agreement to be in this study?

By signing below, you understand:

- That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.
- That you will be taking part in a research study.
- That you may freely leave the research study at any time up until December 30, 2022
- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study

- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved institutions are not changed by your taking part in this study.
- That you agree to the data being stored as part of a data repository

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____

Name of Participant

I give permission for my real name to be used:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Pseudonym: _____

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____

Contact Email/Number

A copy of this information and consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.