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What is This?

Feminist Identity Among Latina Adolescents

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This study explores developing conceptions of feminism among Latina adolescents, their prevalence of feminist endorsement, and whether home environment and well-being are related to feminist identity. One hundred and forty Latina girls (Grades 9 to 12, *M* age = 15) wrote personal narratives of their understanding of feminism and whether they consider themselves feminists. The major themes that emerged in girls' conceptions were notions of feminism either as equality, as femininity, as female empowerment, as bias, or as sexism. Results show older adolescents are more likely to define feminism with regard to group-based status differences and that opposition to female superiority is a common reason for rejecting feminism. Endorsement of an egalitarian-based definition of feminism was correlated with higher body image but was unrelated to self-esteem or parent education.

Keywords: *feminism; Hispanics; narratives; sexism; social identity*

During adolescence, individuals are developing a personal sense of identity (Erikson, 1968). At the same time, they are cognitively maturing in ways that enable an understanding of societal ethnic and gender inequalities (Brown & Bigler, 2005). This simultaneous development means that their growing awareness of societal inequality is intertwined with their personal identity formation (e.g., Phinney, 1989). For members of devalued social groups, the task of positive identity formation may therefore be challenging (Erikson, 1968). For example, girls may have difficulty developing a positive sense of self because of media portrayals of young women as sexual objects with a singular emphasis on appearance (American Psychological Association, 2007; Kilbourne, 1995) and academic and family contexts that communicate girls' intellectual and athletic inferiority (Eccles, Freedman-Doan, Frome, Jacobs, & Yoon, 2000; Fredricks &

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Eccles, 2002). Furthermore, challenges to positive identity formation may be compounded for ethnic minority girls because of the interaction of their two devalued social identities (Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002).

Identification with feminism, defined as an awareness of institutionalized gender inequality and a willingness to join with women to oppose this inequality (see Downing & Roush, 1985), may help girls develop a positive personal identity that acknowledges, but rejects, the social devaluation of their gender. In other words, a feminist identity may serve as a protective buffer against these challenges to positive identity formation for adolescent girls. Experiences with sexism are related to decreased psychological and physical health (American Association of University Women, 1998, 2001; Landrine, Klonoff, Gibbs, Manning, & Lund, 1995). Women who fail to recognize the institutionalized nature of sexism, who blame themselves instead of the discrimination, may be especially vulnerable to the psychologically detrimental effects of sexism (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991; Moradi & Subich, 2002). In contrast, women who identify with feminism are (by definition) aware of sexism and institutional inequality (Downing & Roush, 1985). Among adult women, this feminist identity has been shown to be related to increased psychological well-being (Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006), more positive gendered self-esteem (Burn, Aboud, & Moyles, 2000), and lower rates of disordered eating (Sabik & Tylka, 2006).

Despite adolescence being a crucial period of identity formation, and being associated with increased knowledge of institutional inequalities, little is known about how a feminist identity might contribute to healthy adolescent development. Few studies have examined the role of feminism in the identity development of adolescent girls, and even fewer studies have specifically focused on ethnic minority girls. Therefore, the current study explores conceptions of and identification with feminism among Latina adolescent girls and whether such an identity is associated with positive well-being.

Unique Factors Related to Latinas' Identification with Feminism

As most research on feminist identity has been conducted with European American college women, recent researchers have called for attention to cultural, socioeconomic, and age-related differences in feminist identity (Moradi, Subich, & Phillips, 2002; Vandiver, 2002). European American college women, of whom about 25% identify as feminists, are often hesitant to identify as feminists because of the word's negative connotations (e.g., Williams & Wittig, 1997). For example, many European American college women have gender-egalitarian attitudes but are hesitant to adopt the label because they perceive it to be socially undesirable (Arias & Leaper, 2007; Cowan, Mestlin, & Masek, 1992; Renzetti, 1987; Williams & Wittig, 1997). They often perceive feminism to be antithetical to femininity and nurturance (Caplan, 1985).

Latina adolescents may have a different interpretation of feminism than their European American counterparts. Latina adolescents are developing their identity while belonging to two socially devalued groups (Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996). Because Latina adolescents may experience more incidences of discrimination, they may be more attuned to institutionalized inequalities, and thus more supportive of feminism as an ideology opposing these inequalities (Flores, Carrubba, & Good, 2006). Flores and colleagues (2006) suggest Latina adolescents support feminism more strongly than their European American counterparts and that younger Latina adolescents express more positive attitudes toward feminism than older adolescents.

In contrast, it has also been argued that Latina adolescents may be less likely to identify with feminism than their European American counterparts because the label has often been associated with issues related to White middle-class women and insensitive to the complex intersection of gender, race, and class identities (Moradi, 2005).

Latina adolescents may experience feminism uniquely in other ways as well because of cultural values. For example, girls face an intricate balance between future family and career goals in their identity development (Archer, 1985). Latinas may experience this balance differently from European Americans (Hurtado, 2003). *Marianismo,* the Catholic ideal of a virginal self-sacrificing mother as a script for behavior in Latina culture (Baldwin & De Souza, 2001), may contrast with aspects of feminism that focus on women asserting their individual rights. Marianismo and family obligation may discourage girls from striving for personal achievement and instead foster dependence on men in the preservation of traditionally ascribed family roles (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). From this perspective, Latina

adolescents may perceive identification with feminism as negative because it is a betrayal of cultural values that promote the family.

It is also possible that Latina adolescents would perceive feminism positively, yet define it differently than European Americans. For example, marianismo also idealizes women's positive qualities of maintaining relational ties with the family (Gil & Vasquez, 1996) and allows for a central role for mothers in their daughters' lives (Hurtado, 2003). These aspects of marianismo may lead to positive views of feminism as an ideal valuing feminine qualities and one in which women are united with other women, rather than the equality-focused, individualistic feminism common among European Americans (Gurin, 1982).

Current Study

The current study addresses two primary research questions. First, Latina adolescents' understanding of feminism and the reasons why they do or do not endorse feminism was explored. Because our goal was to illuminate unique conception of feminism, rather than impose academic notions of feminism on our participants, we conducted a qualitative analysis of girls' own definitions of feminism. The psychological study of feminism poses a variety of challenges because a precise definition of what it means to be a feminist can be elusive. Henderson-King and Stewart (1997) suggest that conceptualizing feminist identity through label endorsement—typically, researchers simply asks respondents whether they consider themselves a feminist (see Cowan, Mestlin, & Masek, 1992; Reid & Purcell, 2004)—does not adequately capture the phenomenological and complex nature of feminist consciousness. In addition, the examination of girls' own definitions of feminism is important considering the paucity of available research regarding the meaning of feminism in Latina adolescents.

In addition to examining the emerging themes present in girls' definitions of feminism, we examined whether there were qualitative changes in those definitions across high school. Previous research has neglected developmental trends in emerging feminist consciousness (Moradi et al., 2002). Yet, because adolescents are becoming increasingly aware of institutional inequalities (see Brown & Bigler, 2005) and becoming increasingly sophisticated at taking societal perspectives (Selman, 1976), it seems likely that there will be differences in the way younger and older adolescent girls understand and endorse feminism.

The second primary research question assessed the prevalence and correlates of feminism among Latina adolescents. First, because family

environments create social contexts in which children construct gendered meanings and values (Leaper & Friedman, 2007), we examined whether parents' education levels and mothers' work status were related to girls' endorsement of a feminist identity. Research has shown that girls whose mothers work outside the home or whose parents share breadwinner and homemaker responsibilities are less likely to have traditional gender attitudes than more traditional families (Etaugh, 1993; Gardner & LaBrecque, 1986) and that there is a positive relationship between parents' education levels and nontraditional gender attitudes (Ex & Janssens, 1998). Therefore, it was predicted that girls who endorsed feminism would be more likely to have mothers who worked outside the home and would have parents with higher educational levels than girls who did not. Second, we examined whether a feminist identity was related to girls' self-esteem and body image. Based on prior research with adult women (Burn et al., 2000; Moradi & Subich, 2002; Sabik & Tylka, 2006; Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006), we hypothesized that girls who endorsed feminism would have more positive well-being across the two measures than girls who did not.

Method

Participants

A sample of 600 girls was surveyed as part of a larger study on girls' gendered experiences (details of entire sample are reported in Leaper & Brown, 2008). Of the girls who indicated their ethnicity as "Latina/Hispanic" ($n = 296$), and who provided complete data, 35 were randomly selected from Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 to yield the current sample of 140 Latina adolescents.

Ages ranged from 13 to 19 years ($M = 15.6$, $SD = 1.40$). The sample was recruited from high school classrooms (Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12) and school-related programs in the Los Angeles area. According to participant reports of mothers' education level, 88.4% had no higher than a high school diploma and 11.4% had either attended some college, graduated with a bachelor's degree, or attended graduate school. According to participant reports of fathers' education level, 80% had no higher than a high school diploma, 21% had attended some college, graduated with a bachelor's degree, or attended graduate school. In our sample, 73% of the adolescents reported that their mothers worked at least part-time and 81% reported that their fathers did so. Responses to religious affiliation showed that 77% of

the sample was Catholic, 11% Protestant, 7% had no religion, and 4% indicated "other." Immigration status was not assessed in the questionnaire; thus, analyses will be limited to addressing feminism within a general population of those identifying as Latina.

Procedure

Participants wrote answers to two open-ended essay questions regarding their definitions and opinions of feminism as part of a larger survey entitled "What it Means to be a Girl." The questionnaire and essays were completed in a classroom or similar setting. The entire survey included questions about demographic background, family and peer life, self-concepts, and views regarding school achievement, gender roles, and sexism. In general, girls did not indicate difficulty reading or completing the survey.

Qualitative Measures

Adolescents were first asked, "One of the topics of this survey is to find out what girls think about feminism. What is *your* definition of a feminist?" (italics in original). The second question asked, "Do you consider yourself a feminist?" Girls indicated either yes or no. This question was followed with "Please provide an explanation for your answer." Girls wrote in their own answers in the space provided under each question.

Preliminary Qualitative Analyses

To derive inductive categories for girls' answers to the open-ended questions, the first author read 100 randomly selected Latina surveys, 25 from each of the four grades, from the larger sample of 296 Latina surveys. Rather than using a priori conceptions of feminism to categorize the qualitative data, the first author identified common themes emerging from adolescents' responses. After reading through the surveys a number of times, the first author created a total of 18 initial categories (see the appendix) for the definition of feminism question (see Bryman & Burgess, 1994 for discussion of inductive approaches to qualitative analysis).

Next, the surveys that were randomly selected to derive themes were put back into the total sample, and another sample of 140 surveys was randomly selected. Surveys were only selected if an answer was provided for both questions; a total of 20 surveys were removed from the sample due to lack of response. Thirty-five surveys were selected for each of the four grades (i.e., 9 to 12) for a total of 140 final participants.

Next, an undergraduate research assistant and the first author separately coded participants' responses using the 18 inductively derived categories created by the first author. The two researchers separately coded the first 100 surveys (25 surveys from each grade) and then discussed the codes until the two coders agreed. When there was a disagreement in the coding, the first author's codes were used. To determine reliability, the last 40 questionnaires (10 from each grade) were coded separately, and a reliability score was calculated using a percentage agreement score to determine interrater reliability. Kappa value was not calculated because of the low frequency of the cells. The percentage agreement between the two coders was 88%.

Quantitative Measures

Family context variables. Participants indicated mothers' and fathers' highest level of education as 1 (*elementary school*), 2 (*some high school*), 3 (*high school graduate*), 4 (*some college*), 5 (*bachelor's degree*), 6 (*some graduate school*), or 7 (*graduate degree*). Participants indicated mother's work status as either *not employed*, *part-time*, or *full-time*.

Well-being variables. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965). Sample items from the 8-item measure included, "I feel that I have a number of good qualities," "All in all, I often feel that I am a failure" (reverse coded), and "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself." Body image was measured using the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Sample items from the 5-item measure included, "I like my body just the way it is," and "I wish I looked a lot different" (reverse coded). Participants rated their agreement with the items, indicating 1 (*disagree strongly*), 2 (*disagree somewhat*), 3 (*agree somewhat*), or 4 (*agree strongly*). Both measures had high internal consistency (self-esteem α = .90; body image: α = .72).

Results

Research Question 1: Understanding Feminism and Reasons for Endorsement

Five major themes emerged from adolescents' personal definitions of feminism and their explanations for or against their endorsement of feminism. The first author identified themes by combining similar ideas from the 18 initial categories in the appendix. Themes were not mutually exclusive,

Table 1
Percentage of Girls Within Each Age Group Based on
Their Definition and Endorsement of Feminism

Age Group	n	Equality	Femininity	Female Empowerment	Bias	Sexism
				Definition of Feminism		
9th/10th graders	70	37%	51%	16%	11%	10%
Endorsed		73%[a]	47%	64%	0%	29%
Not endorsed		15%	14%	29%	88%	57%
11th/12th graders	70	56%	21%	37%	26%	10%
Endorsed		54%[a]	40%	46%	22%	14%
Not endorsed		44%	20%	46%	72%	71%

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because categories are not mutually exclusive and some girls responded "I don't know" when asked about endorsement.
a. Largest category (i.e., greatest number of girls) per age group based on type and endorsement of feminism.

and adolescents included multiple, sometimes contradictory, ideas within the same expression. Thus, one girl could be included under multiple themes. For the purposes of organizing the data, the 9th and 10th graders were combined to create a younger group ($n = 70$), and the 11th and 12th graders were combined to create an older group ($n = 70$). Table 1 summarizes the distribution of feminist definition themes among older and younger adolescents and also shows how many girls endorsed feminism within each definition.

Theme 1: Feminism as Equality

Overall, the theme of equality between women and men was the most frequently mentioned theme in girls' definitions of feminism, and this theme was more common among older girls (56%, $n = 39$) than younger girls (37%, $n = 26$).

Girls who included notions of equality in their definitions most often wrote that feminists believe in equality between men and women or that they want women to have the same rights as men. They often elaborated on ideas of "equality" and "rights" in terms of being respected, doing the same jobs, or having the same abilities. For example, one girl wrote,

A person who believes in many women who can do anything any guys or any other person can do. (11th grader)

Notions of efficacy and worth of women were implicit in many of these definitions, as was the acknowledgement that there has been a systemic disrespect and underestimation of women. This was illustrated in the following comment:

Men are known better than women in a way and being stronger and having more skills than women. Those who believe different as equal for men and women are "feminist." Feminists believe in real equality. (12th grader)

In addition, there was an element of action or agency associated with fighting for equality in some girls' remarks. For instance, one girl observed,

A woman who stands up for female rights and fights so that males and females get the same respect and treated equally. (10th grader)

Overall, these definitions reflected an understanding of gender inequalities at the level of society and an understanding of feminism as a group opposed to this systemic inequality.

Endorsing equality. Among girls defining feminism as equality, a higher proportion of younger adolescents (73%, *n* = 19 of 26) endorsed a feminist identity than did older adolescents (54%, *n* = 21 of 39). Most girls who endorsed this form of feminism did so because of a belief in equality either in general or for themselves (40%) as illustrated in the following examples:

I believe both men and women deserve to be treated with equality. (11th grader)

I want to be treated with the respect that I deserve. I'm not any different than most of the guys I know. (10th grader)

Yes, I think I could do the same as a guy. (9th grader)

Beliefs in equality show that girls implicitly understood feminism as an ideology whereby one could oppose unfair treatment or underestimation of women.

Some girls, particularly older adolescents (14 older vs. 7 younger girls), who endorsed an equality-based feminism included ideas about promoting women in their endorsements.

As women, we have the power to change things so that they can favor us. (11th grader)

I believe women should be able to do whatever they want. (10th grader)

A smaller number of girls (6 older and 3 younger) who endorsed equality-based feminism included sentiments against male power in their endorsement.

I don't like it when men see themselves as superior to us. (12th grader)

I tell girls to open their eyes to some things, like how guys will say and do anything just to "consummate." (9th grader)

These sentiments demonstrated girls' opposition to gender inequality in terms of a focus on men themselves as a barrier to women's empowerment.

Opposition to "feminism." Among girls defining feminism as equality, 44% ($n = 17$ of 39) of older girls and 15% ($n = 4$ of 26) of younger girls did not endorse feminism. Traditional values and opposition to female superiority were the most common rejections of feminism among these girls. Opposition to female superiority included sentiments that women should not want to be better or against men (given by 6 older girls and 2 younger girls), as in the following examples:

I believe that as females we have equal rights as the men but not excessive rights or more than men because we're women. (11th grader)

I think sometimes so-called feminists do not like men at all which is wrong. If you tell a guy you're a feminist they might think you don't like men. (9th grader)

These girls did not want to endorse feminism based on the idea that women might try to gain power above men, an idea antithetical to the equality they wanted to promote.

Those opposing equality-based feminism because of traditional values (6 older girls and 2 younger girls) wrote about traditional family and work gender roles.

I'm not very sure if I'm a feminist because I'm the kind of girl that always depends on a guy for something. I see a guy as being a provider. (12th grader)

> Overall women should be able to do what men do but there are exceptions like having dangerous jobs. (9th grader)

These girls' opposition to feminism came in the form of opposing the disintegration of men's roles as providers and protectors for women.

Summary. Among those defining feminism as equality, the majority of girls considered themselves to be a feminist. Most frequently, this was due to a belief in equality between men and women. A sizeable minority of girls, more frequently older than younger adolescents, opposed such a feminist identity. The most common barriers to feminist endorsement were sentiments against female superiority and traditional values in family and work roles.

Theme 2: Feminism as Femininity

After equality, the most frequent definition of feminism was femininity, the idea that feminists are women who embrace their femininity and behave as "real" women. These definitions did not include awareness of status differences between men and women. This definition of feminism as being feminine appeared more often in younger adolescents' responses (51%, $n = 36$) than in older adolescents' responses (21%, $n = 15$).

Girls in this category tended to describe feminists as sensitive, delicate, wanting to date men, wearing dresses and make-up, and doing "girl" things as in the following examples:

> A feminist is a girl that does their best. Someone that is a good mother. (11th grader)

> A girl who is a feminist is a very feminine girl who cares about themselves, about their looks, and other stuff. Feeling is a part of that. (9th grader)

These definitions mostly showed an appreciation of femininity but a few girls' descriptions of feminists as being feminine implied dislike of feminine qualities.

> My definition about feminist is girls who always care about how they look and have jealousy over other women. (10th grader)

These negative associations of femininity often included ideas of female cattiness and extreme preoccupation with physical beauty.

Endorsing being "girly." Among girls defining feminism as "feminine," many also mentioned ways they considered themselves as girl-like. This was seen in 40% (*n* = 6 of 15) older adolescents and 47% (*n* = 17 of 36) younger adolescents. They mostly expressed positive feelings about growing into an adult woman, as illustrated in the subsequent examples:

> Well I do because I love myself, I'm best friends with myself. I feel sometimes confident. And sometimes because I don't have breasts I'm flat and I see others but they look more feminine and because they are more tall. I'm short not tall but I feel feminist. (11th grader)

> I'm a very sensitive person I'm warm-hearted. I cry for every little thing that involves emotions. (10th grader)

> I am a girl who is turning into a lady or a woman and I'm trying the best to become of what's to become of me. (9th grader)

These girls seemed to perceive feminism as a way to understand development into womanhood.

Opposition to "feminism." Among girls defining feminism as being feminine, there were 20% (*n* = 3 of 15) of older girls and 14% (*n* = 5 of 36) of younger girls who did not endorse feminism because they did not consider themselves to be "girly." Girls often wrote that they were not feminine because they embraced some male qualities or did not care about how they looked:

> I care about many things in life. I don't think that I care just about looks and how to do my hair. (10th grader)

> Well I like girl stuff and I like boys' things too. So I don't know what will describe me. (10th grade)

Girls opposed being girl-like if they felt like they participated in boy sport activities or did not put a lot of effort into their physical appearance.

Combining femininity and female empowerment. Some girls combined notions of femininity with aspects of female empowerment, and sometimes gender equality, signaling awareness of institutionalized inequality alongside notions of femininity. The following excerpts illustrate these joint themes:

> A feminist means a girl/women that talks, walk, laugh, look as a girl/women. Feminist could be the person who cares about other women, helps other women to keep going with life, studies, future, etc. Feminist is a girl/women

that always cares about what is good for everybody and not just for them. (12th grader)

Feminist is being able to feel comfortable with who you are and like girly things. Understand a girl and her point of view. We are able to do things guys do. (10th grader)

This combination of ideas of femininity with notions of female empowerment was seen across grade levels and suggests that some girls combined feelings of pride in their group membership with a nascent sense of societal-level gender inequalities. Female empowerment was the next most common theme after the femininity theme and is reviewed in the next section.

Summary. Younger adolescents were more likely than older adolescents to define feminism as about femininity. Many girls, albeit not an absolute majority, considered themselves to be feminine, and thus a feminist. There were no clear age differences in the endorsement of this kind of feminism.

Theme 3: Feminism as Female Empowerment

The third most common theme appearing in girls' definitions of feminism involved associating with women, helping women, wanting women's lives to improve, and celebrating the qualities of womanhood with an awareness of gender status differences. A higher number of older adolescents (37%, $n = 26$) than younger (16%, $n = 11$) adolescents expressed notions of female empowerment in their definitions. For example, two girls wrote as follows:

I think a feminist is someone who needs to be respected, cared about and supposed to be loved. For the reason the ladies are the one who bring everybody into this world and needs the most respect. Feminist is someone to look up to. (12th grader)

Feminist is being strong, trusted, understanding, never letting anybody hurt you or get to you in a bad way. It's also understanding other women and help them in hard situations. Also not letting anybody stop you for your decisions. (10th grader)

These definitions categorized under the theme of female empowerment reflect disagreement with the unequal status of men and women, not on the basis of equality per se but on the basis of valuing women and what they have to offer.

Endorsing empowerment. Among adolescents including notions of female empowerment in their definitions of feminism, feminism was fully endorsed by 46% (n = 12 of 26) of older adolescents and 64% (n = 7 of 11) younger adolescents. Almost all (all of the older and 6 of the 7 younger) of the girls who endorsed this form of feminism believed in female empowerment or expressed a desire to help other women. A couple of the girls' excerpts capture these sentiments:

> Feminism is a very strong word for me and not very likely some women or girls understand about each other or themselves perfectly. We can see women getting hurt. Some women chicken out when they are asked for help. (10th grader)

> If any woman I know is hurt or in need I will do what I can to help. (9th grader)

Some girls who endorsed this form of feminism (5 older and 4 younger) wrote about women needing to fight against male biases. This is illustrated in the following two examples:

> My mother and I suffer for guys that live in my house, they don't respect us. (11th grader)

> Women should fight for rights. I wanted to play football but coaches tell me that I can't because I am a female. (10th grader)

In these cases, standing up for women was perceived in terms of opposition to men.

Opposition to "feminism." Among girls defining feminism in terms of female empowerment, 46% (n = 12 of 26) of older and 29% (n = 2 of 11) of younger adolescents did not endorse feminism. The most common reason for opposing feminism was negative reflections on female bias and superiority (given by 9 older girls and 1 younger girl). Here are some explanations:

> We all need to be respected, man or woman. (12th grader)

> I'm not saying that I am better than a man, but I do think men are not superior than women in all level of either learning or with job opportunity. (10th grader)

These girls associated women's empowerment with the devaluation of men.

Summary. Among those defining feminism as believing in female empowerment, a majority of younger adolescents and about half of older adolescents considered themselves to be a feminist. Most frequently, this

was due to a belief in helping other women. A sizeable minority of girls, more frequently older than younger adolescents, opposed such a feminist identity. The most common barriers to feminist endorsement were sentiments against female superiority.

Theme 4: Feminism as Bias

Bias, specifically women favoring other women and at times disliking men, was the fourth most frequent definition. Definitions of bias were more likely to appear in the responses of older adolescents (26%, $n = 18$) than the younger adolescents (11%, $n = 8$). A couple of examples exemplify their interpretations:

> A definition of a feminist is that putting down the men. It's saying that women are better than men. (11th grader)

> When a person chooses overall the females instead of the guys. (10th grader)

These definitions reflect perceptions that feminists promote women's rights, not in the pursuit of gender equality (as seen in definitions of feminism as equality) or women's special status (as seen in definitions of feminism as female empowerment), but in pursuit of special advantages and evaluations over men.

Opposition to "feminism." Most girls who defined feminism as bias were likely to oppose feminism (older girls: 72%, $n = 13$ of 18; younger girls: 88%, $n = 7$ of 8). Often they expressed mixed feelings about opposing men and reasserted their belief in equality rather than favoritism of one gender over the other, as seen in the following excerpts:

> In a way I think women do have a lot more power but in another way we shouldn't make guys feel less. (12th grader)

> If you tell a guy you are a feminist they might think you don't like men. At the same time I do think women should stand up for themselves. (9th grader)

> I treat everyone the same, I don't prefer one sex over the other. (10th grader)

These girls seemed particularly sensitive to the intergroup dynamics and power between men and women in their perceptions of feminism.

Opposition to male power. A few ($n = 4$) of the older girls who defined feminism as bias, expressed a belief in gender equality with favoritism of

women over men in the form of female empowerment and sometimes in the form of opposition to male power:

Your gender is not something I think should stop you from getting a "man" job. Women can do anything. (12th grader)

Yes because whatever I do I think that is going to come out great just because girls have a bigger imagination than guys. (11th grader)

I think the female should have more rights and be independent from the male species. (12th grader)

These endorsements reflected a "prowoman" in-group attitude and sometimes a derogation of the male out-group.

Summary. Some girls defined feminism as women being biased against men. This occurred primarily among older adolescents. The large majority of these girls opposed this view in favor of beliefs about equality between women and men.

Theme 5: Feminism as Sexism

The final theme that emerged from girls' responses was that feminism was synonymous with sexism. That is, some girls believed that a feminist is against women's rights, oppresses women, or believes that women should be homemakers. This theme appeared equally in the definitions of older adolescents (10%, $n = 7$) and younger adolescents (10%, $n = 7$). The following are representative examples of these girls' views:

The word feminist is to me being a person that doesn't like women. There have been cases in which the husband is so feminist that he ends up killing his wife. A feminist is a person that doesn't trust women, doesn't appreciate them for who they are and is a person that tries to be superior to all human-kind. (12th grader)

Someone who thinks women or girls should do what they have done forever. Like women cleaned and cooked and men just worked. And girls were just girls. (10th grader)

When girls are not expected to do things that boys do. (9th grader)

Defining feminism as sexism demonstrates an awareness of group-based inequalities, albeit a reversed notion of feminism from academic

and mainstream notions of feminism. Perhaps, these girls misconstrued the meaning of feminism in this manner due to associating the "ism" suffix with words that indicate bias or oppression, such as racism, sexism, or classism.

Opposition to "feminism." Among the girls who defined feminism as sexism, most of the older group (71%, $n = 5$ of 7) and younger group (57%, $n = 4$ of 7) were opposed to considering themselves as a "feminist." This is seen in the following excerpts:

> No, because I see everyone the same, we are all humans no matter what nationality, we are people with feelings and we should all care for each other not only when something bad happens. (12th grader)

> No, I think a woman can do whatever they want and them being a woman shouldn't matter. (10th grader)

Endorsing "feminism." Among those girls defining feminism as sexism, only one older adolescent and two younger adolescents personally endorsed feminism for themselves. For example, one girl wrote,

> This is because a woman should do what they do, meaning if they are a wife they should work full-time, do all the cleaning and cooking, and still take care of their children. (10th grader)

Overview of Definition Combinations

Overall, 66% ($n = 92$) of the participants wrote definitions that did not overlap with any other definition. Of these single-themed definitions, 39% were categorized as Femininity, 37% as Equality, 10% as Bias, 10% as Sexist, and 4% as Empowerment. Overall, 34% ($n = 48$) of the participants wrote definitions that did overlap, and it was the Empowerment and Equality themes that most overlapped with other definitions. The most common combination was Equality with Empowerment (29%), followed by Equality with Empowerment and Bias (15%), followed by Empowerment and Bias (10%).

Age-Related Differences in Definitions of Feminism

To examine age-related differences in girls' awareness of societal level inequalities, girls' conceptions of feminism were classified into

two categories: definitions that included an awareness of group-based status differences (definitions coded as Equality, Empowerment, Bias, or Sexism) and definitions that only included notions of femininity without any reference to status-based differences (definitions coded as Feminine *only*). Following these guidelines, 26% (n = 36) fell into the category defined as a lack of awareness of group-based inequalities and 74% (n = 104) fell into the category defined as awareness of these inequalities. Participants who defined feminism as femininity but also included a definition categorized as Equality, Empowerment, Bias, or Sexism (n = 15; 11%) were classified into the latter category.

To assess whether an awareness of group-based inequalities in definitions of feminism increased with age, a logit regression was conducted to examine whether age predicted membership in these two categories of definitions (Equality, Empowerment, Bias, Sexism vs. Femininity only). Results indicated that girls who mentioned gender inequalities in their definitions of feminism were significantly older than girls who did not mention gender inequalities, B = .42, Wald's χ^2 = 7.51, p = .006, odds ratio = 1.52. For every 1 year increase in age, the odds of including an awareness of status differentials in one's definition of feminism (vs. no awareness) increased by a factor of 1.52.

Research Question 2: Prevalence and Correlates of Feminism

The second research question assessed what percentage of girls endorsed a feminist identity and whether the endorsement of a feminist identity is related to family context variables, self-esteem, and body image. We acknowledge conceptions and attitudes toward feminism in each category are diverse. While the goal of the qualitative analysis was to describe these very complexities in girls' perceptions, the goal of the quantitative analysis is to synthesize conceptions of feminism into either a positive or negative orientation toward feminism and explore whether these two orientations are differentially related to family context variables and well-being. Because the typical definition of feminism includes an awareness of systematic gender inequalities and a belief in equality between men and women, we limited these analyses to include only those girls defining feminism as Equality or Empowerment. Girls that defined feminism as Femininity *only* (n = 36), who included Bias (n = 26, 5 overlap with sexism), or Sexism (n = 14, 5 overlap with bias) as part of their definitions, or who only wrote "I don't know" or something similar in

their endorsement, and thus could not be classified ($n = 9$) were left out of the analysis. This left us with a sample of 65 girls.

First, we examined the prevalence of feminism endorsement among the sample. Of the girls defining feminism as about either Equality or Empowerment, 66% ($n = 43$) endorsed the typical definition of feminism. In contrast, 34% of girls ($n = 22$) opposed the typical definition of feminism. Thus, the majority of girls who defined feminism according to the typical definition of feminism endorsed a feminist identity.

Next, we examined the correlates of feminism endorsement. To examine whether endorsement of feminism was related to age, a logit regression was conducted to see if those who endorsed feminism ($n = 43$) differed in age from those who did not ($n = 22$). Results indicated that age was not related to endorsement among those defining feminism as related to gender inequality, $B = -.21$, Wald's $\chi^2 = 1.16$, $p = .28$, odds ratio = .81.

Analyses also examined whether there were differences in family context variables between girls who endorsed feminism and those who did not. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to see whether girls who endorsed feminism ($n = 43$) were differentially distributed into the two groups of mothers' work status (those with mothers who do not work versus who work part-time/full time) from girls who did not endorse feminism ($n = 22$). Girls' endorsement of feminism did significantly differ based on mothers' work status, $\chi^2(2, N = 63) = 6.11$ $p = .013$. Out of the 22 girls not endorsing feminism, 95% ($n = 21$) had mothers who were employed outside the home, 5% ($n = 1$) had a mother not employed outside the home. However, for the 41 girls endorsing feminism (2 missing mom work status data), 68% ($n = 28$) had mothers who were employed outside the home, and 32% ($n = 13$) had mothers who were not employed out of the home. Restated, only 57% of the girls whose mothers were employed outside the home endorsed feminism, whereas 93% of the girls whose mothers were not employed outside the home endorsed feminism.

Looking at parents' education levels, a logit regression analysis indicated that there were no differences based on girls' endorsement of feminism in mothers' education level, $B = .11$, Wald's $\chi^2 = .16$, $p = .69$, odds ratio = 1.12 (girls who endorsed feminism, $M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.03$; girls who did not endorse feminism, $M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.02$) or in father's education level, $B = .11$, Wald's $\chi^2 = .32$, $p = .57$, odds ratio = 1.12 (girls who endorsed feminism, $M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.38$; girls who did not endorse feminism, $M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.20$). For girls who endorsed feminism as well as

those girls who did not, both parents' education levels averaged between some high school and high school graduate.

Finally, logit regressions were conducted to examine whether there were differences in well-being between girls who endorsed feminism and those who did not. Results indicated that self-esteem did not significantly predict membership into two categories of feminist endorsement, $B = .20$, Wald's $\chi^2 = .34$, $p = .56$, odds ratio = 1.23, girls who endorsed feminism did not differ in self-esteem ($M = 2.99$, $SD = .74$) from those who did not endorse feminism ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .73$). However, logit regression indicated that body image did predict feminist endorsement, $B = 1.03$, Wald's $\chi^2 = 6.37$, $p = .012$, odds ratio = 2.80. For every one unit increase in positive feelings toward one's body image, the odds that girls endorsed feminism (vs. not fully endorsing feminism) increased by a factor of 2.80. Girls who endorsed feminism did have more positive body images ($M = 2.97$, $SD = .67$) than girls who did not endorse feminism ($M = 2.56$, $SD = .69$).

Discussion

The current study addressed two primary research questions. First, Latina adolescents' understanding of feminism and the reasons why they do or do not endorse feminism was explored. Qualitative analyses indicated that there was considerable variation in girls' understanding of feminism, and this understanding differed by age. Older adolescents were most likely to define feminism in terms of differences in status between men and women, whereas younger adolescents were most likely to define feminism in terms of possessing feminine qualities. Quantitative analyses supported this developmental trend, in that girls who mentioned gender inequalities in their definitions of feminism were significantly older than girls who did not mention gender inequalities. This developmental difference could reflect a growing awareness of group-based status differences during adolescence (Brown & Bigler, 2005). It is also possible that older adolescents simply had more experience with the word "feminism." Therefore, the girls' definitions and opinions reflect increased exposure to feminism (see Leaper & Brown, 2008), rather than increased awareness of institutionalized gender inequalities.

The quantitative analyses did not show age predicting feminist identity endorsement, but qualitative analysis indicated that older and younger

adolescents had different kinds of attitudes about feminism. Although older adolescents were more likely than younger adolescents to define feminism in terms of equality and female empowerment, younger adolescents were more likely to endorse feminism when they defined it these ways. Older adolescents who defined it this way were more likely than the younger adolescents to eschew notions of equality-based feminism in favor of traditional family values that support gender differences. Older adolescents were also more likely than younger adolescents to be opposed to ideas of female superiority. Although older adolescents were against women being considered superior to men, when they did endorse feminism, it was often because of their desire to help and support other women.

It has been suggested that how a person feels about feminists is more influential than actual political views in determining whether she or he endorses a feminist identity (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997). The current study seems to support this. Most girls did not want to align with an ideology that appears hateful or negative. This negativity often took the form of female superiority over men, suggesting that an unwillingness to align with feminism may be related to an unwillingness to be perceived as "antimale." However, when Latina girls defined feminism as about equality or female empowerment, the majority (66%) endorsed a feminist identity.

Flores and colleagues (2006) found that younger Latina adolescents express more positive attitudes toward feminism than older adolescents. Our findings are also consistent with this pattern. Older Latina adolescents may be more hesitant than younger adolescents to identify with feminism if their connotation for feminism is "antimale." The tendency for girls to eschew association with an identity that positions them in opposition to men may be particularly important during later adolescence when many girls are focused on cross-gender companionship and being attractive (Blyth & Foster-Clark, 1987; Leaper & Anderson, 1997; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Thus, girls' concern over establishing long-term heterosexual relationships makes it particularly risky to adopt an identity that is likely to be met with male disapproval.

Our data also sheds light on aspects of feminist conceptions that may be unique to our Latina sample. For example, qualitative analyses indicated a common appreciation of feminine qualities in conceptions of feminism. This may be particularly important in our Latina sample as it relates to *marianismo,* the ideal of the sacrificing mother (Baldwin & De Souza, 2001). Marianismo has been described as the idea that women should not

strive for their own status, but be dependent on men; however, it also idealizes women's positive qualities of maintaining relational ties with families and preserving the traditions and integrity of the family (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Typically, marianismo is depicted as part of a psychology of Latinas that is more passive and oppressed than European American women (Ginorio & Martinez, 1996).

Many Latinas in our sample expressed notions of female empowerment rather than passive acceptance of an inferior status. Girls often integrated feminine appreciation with notions of equality. They also expressed beliefs about the importance of supporting other women. Thus, some Latina girls may combine the honoring of womanhood associated with marianismo (e.g., Hurtado, 2003) with the valuing of gender equality. We note, however, that we did not collect acculturation and immigration information; thus, inferences about the cultural influences on conceptions of feminism are speculative.

Contrary to other studies showing no relationship between feminism and body image (i.e., Mintz & Betz, 1986), our quantitative analyses show that those adolescents who endorsed a feminist identity had greater body satisfaction than those adolescents who did not. Others suggest that studies failing to find a link between feminist endorsement and body image overlooked specific kinds of feminism beliefs that relate to body image because they used one-dimensional scales to measure feminism (Dionne, Davis, Fox, & Gurevich, 1995). Because we used qualitative methods to understand girls' perceptions and endorsement of feminism, our measures may be more sensitive in capturing aspects of feminist identity related to body image. For example, our methods allowed girls to define and endorse feminism in their own ways and hence, we captured aspects of feminist identity that include positive feelings about female empowerment and support for women, rather than simply a belief that men and women are equal. The relationship between body image and feminist endorsement in our study suggests that Latina adolescents who support feminism may also be aware that oppressive and exclusive messages about female beauty are part of systemic sexism which impairs, rather than supports, women. Attributing these messages to sexism may buffer the tendency to internalize pressure for impossible beauty standards. Also, self-esteem may not have predicted girls' endorsement in our study because it is a broad construct that encompasses many different aspects of the self and therefore does not map directly onto whether one recognizes and opposes gender inequalities.

Although parents' education did not predict feminist endorsement, mother's work status did. Specifically, counter to predictions, a relatively greater percentage of girls whose mothers were *not* employed outside the home endorsed feminism, compared to girls whose mothers were employed outside the home. Although previous research has shown that girls whose mothers are not employed outside the home hold more traditional gender attitudes than less traditional families (Etaugh, 1993; Gardner & LaBrecque, 1986), the findings from the current study suggest Latina girls with stay-at-home mothers endorse more feminist (i.e., nontraditional) beliefs than girls with working mothers. It is unclear whether these beliefs are developed in purposeful opposition to their mothers, or whether these beliefs are developed because of a differing awareness of gender inequalities. Future studies should look closely at socialization factors at home as well as acculturation experiences to understand influences on feminist identity development and gender attitudes while also continuing to use mixed-methods designs to identify the full spectrum of feminist consciousness among diverse adolescent populations.

There are limitations to the current study. Primarily, our study lacks information about girls' cultural and family socialization environments that would give a context to adolescents' perspectives of feminism. Daily practices in the family environment, family values, family relationships, and the specific kinds of work mothers and fathers do inside and outside the home would be the kind of data needed to truly capture the effects of family structural variables on girls' perspectives of feminism. The absence of information on girls' immigration and acculturation status also prevents us from understanding how their perspectives reflect typical gender development within Latino culture in the United States. In addition, girls living in Los Angeles may not be reflective of Latinas in other locations. Furthermore, the lack of acculturation information prevents us from knowing how language proficiency might have affected girls' abilities to express their views of feminism. Last, our interpretations regarding developmental trends in girls' understandings of feminism are based on cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal data, and thus we are limited in making truly developmental claims about these findings.

Overall, this study suggests that adolescent minority girls, rather than endorsing negative sentiments against men, negotiate an opposition to gender inequalities with a belief in female empowerment. Furthermore, despite the noted limitations, this study highlights that girls' understanding of feminism is increasingly complex and nuanced across adolescence.

Appendix
Original Feminism Definition Codes,
Examples, and Grouping Themes

Equality theme

    Equality (*n* = 48)   Equal standards, rights, treatment, opportunities

    Workplace (*n* = 4)   Believes in career, income equality, opportunities in work

    Education (*n* = 1)   Believes in equal opportunities in science/math/engineering

    Domestic (*n* = 1)   Equality in family, home, relationships

    Ability (*n* = 12)   Believes women as capable as a man

    Action (*n* = 20)   Wants to do something, tries to change things, participates

    Not antimale (*n* = 1)   Is someone who is not antimale, likes males

Feminine theme (*n* = 51)   When girls act really feminine, into their looks, delicate

Female empowerment theme

    Strong (*n* = 4)   "Superwoman," strong-willed, determined, fierce, hardworking

    Independence (*n* = 13)   Not dependent on men, doesn't conform, acts on her own

    Prowoman (*n* = 21)   Who likes other women, believes in and helps women

    Female power (*n* = 15)   Believes in female power, wants women to be powerful

Bias theme

    Extreme (*n* = 1)   Extreme, radical, hardcore, narrow-minded, biased

    Antimale (*n* = 4)   Who doesn't like men

    Chivalry (*n* = 1)   Won't let men do anything for them

    In-group bias (*n* = 21)   Only looks at views of women, wants unfair advantage

    Out-group bias (*n* = 4)   Suppresses men by getting more than they have

Sexist theme (*n* = 14)   Someone who thinks males are better than females

Note: There were no subthemes for feminine theme or sexist theme.

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