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"The Sisterhood is Watching": Challenging Identity and Agency in Citizenship

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If a woman is raped, other women react. We understand there is no such thing as an isolated attack on an individual woman. All women are us. When a sister is raped, it is a rape of the sisterhood.[1]

Abstract

"The *Garneau Sisterhood* is watching", warns an impromptu poster in the Garneau community, following a police warning for women to take safety precautions subsequent to announcements of a serial rapist in the area. In this context, tensions exist between the individual, the state and the collective. In this interpretivist study, we invoke the lens of feminist theory to examine the relationship between identity and agency in a collective conceptualization of the citizen. Through content analysis of a sampling of public media, we present the case of the *Garneau Sisterhood* to consider the relationship between collective identity and agency in challenging the constraints of individualist notions of citizenship. Finally, we argue that feminist citizenship education is needed to engage the notion of collective identity and agency as a source of empowerment for students, and other citizens, to raise issues of importance in the public sphere.

Introduction

After a series of rapes in the spring of 2008, the Edmonton Police Service warned women in the Garneau area to take extra precautions by locking their doors and reporting suspicious activity to police authorities. In response to the police warning, a group of anonymous citizens known as the *Garneau Sisterhood* began a poster campaign in their neighbourhood, arguing that the onus for dealing with this issue should not be placed on the women. As educators, the emergence of this activist campaign sparked questions for us around issues of citizenship education.

While the notion of citizenship is contested (den Heyer, 2006), we agree with Narayan (2007) in her understanding of citizenship as the "relationships that those who inhabit a nation have to the state, and to the various aspects of collective national life" (p. 48), suggesting an

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[1] This data was collected from a poster displayed in the Garneau area. Whenever posters are referenced in this paper, we indicate the reference as (Garneau Sisterhood Poster). In consideration of validity of data, we feel compelled to note that, subsequent to our data collection period, the posters were made accessible online at http://garneausisterhood.weebly.com/index.html.

interplay between the concepts of the individual, the collective and the state. While the relationship between the state and individual is well understood in liberal democracies (Jaggar, 2005), Narayan (2007) signified the collective aspect of citizenship that is often absent from theories of citizenship identity and agency. In consideration of this conceptualization of citizenship, we suggest educators involved with citizenship education must question, *Who is the citizen? How is agency enacted within a collective identity? In what ways might feminist citizenship education provide agency for marginalized citizens to participate as active members in public spaces?*

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between identity and agency in a collective conceptualization of the citizen. Additionally, we argue that feminist citizenship education provides space for discourses of the collective for marginalized citizens to participate as agents in democracy. We begin with feminist theory to examine concepts of citizen and agency, considering the ways that collective groups of feminist activists have challenged citizenship by deconstructing the notion of private/public spheres that serve to exclude women. Next, we use the case of the *Garneau Sisterhood* to consider the relationship between collective identity and agency as being powerful for citizens to challenge the limitations of individualist notions of citizenship. Finally, we argue that feminist citizenship education provides space for students to engage with the notion of collective identity and agency, and empower them to raise issues of importance in the public sphere.

In constructing this paper, we are aware of our subjectivities as both educators and researchers concerned with citizenship education. We recognize our own biases as we initially identified the questions of identity and agency that emerged in our first reading of the *Sisterhood*. Therefore, we are also conscious that our interpretation of the events related to the *Sisterhood* involve the telling of a story (Denzin, 1998) that can be neither neutral nor objective. However, we argue that the feminist lens used to analyze the case allowed us (and will also allow the readers of this article) to gain insight into the power of the collective in citizenship struggles.

Who is the Citizen?

Historically, citizenship has been gendered as masculine, as those who were defined as citizens were engaged in buying/selling property, civil service, and governing in the public sphere (Jaggar, 2005). The private has been a symbolically feminine sphere, in contrast to the public sphere, whereby citizenship rights and privileges are both upheld and practiced (Dillabough, 1999). In the context of the public/private split, women have been excluded from political power and, therefore, "from the realm of citizenship" (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999, p. 162).

Even in modern democracy, women's participation as full members is situated within inequalities, as public space is gendered as a masculine domain whereby "men were used as the standard or norm for understanding citizenship" (Tupper, 2008b, p. 70). Pateman (1992) theorized that the construct of citizenship was founded on the basis of the exclusion of women, and therefore, "women, our bodies and distinctive capacities, represented all that citizenship was not. 'Citizenship' has gained its meaning through the exclusion of women" (p. 19). Therefore, in modern liberal views of citizenship, the rights of individualism are valued, and patriarchal separation of private and public spheres is validated (Tupper, 2008b).

The notion of the private sphere serves to construct boundaries whereby women have lacked the privileges of citizenship and are positioned as needing protection (Jaggar, 2005). Through the logic of masculinist protection, the state establishes mechanisms for ensuring protection through surveillance, police, and repression of criticism (Young, 2003), thereby

confining the agency of citizens. The state demotes the members of a democracy to a position of dependants that need protection, as officials "adopt the stance of masculine protector, telling us to entrust our lives to them, not to question their decisions about what will keep us safe" (p. 9).

Tupper (2008b) argued that modern liberal democracies are problematic in the context of citizenship education. The meta-narrative of universal citizenship portrayed in liberal citizenship perpetuates an acceptance "that democracy exists, despite feminist claims to the contrary, and accepts that citizenship exists universally" (p. 70). In this meta-narrative, assumptions are made that the act of simply acquiring the status of citizen assures individuals are empowered as agents to enact full citizenship rights. However, Tupper maintained that full lived-experiences of citizenship are dependent on a multitude of factors, including gender. The impact of the universal citizen meta-narrative in citizenship education results in students "who are less able to understand the complexities of the world they inhabit, less able to integrate those experiences into a growing 'making sense' of that world" (Tupper, 2008a, p. 82). The meta-narrative of universal citizen constrains spaces for those who are marginalized by the constructs of liberal citizenship, disempowering their capacity for agency, as the identity of citizen is assumed in democracy.

Similarly, Young (1987) argued that the identity of the political subject "should foster a conception of public which in principle excludes no persons, aspects of persons' lives, or topics of discussion and which encourages aesthetic as well as discursive expression" (p. 76). In recognizing the whole aspect of the citizen, the notion of consensus is relinquished in the acknowledgement and appreciation of differences in identity. However, Mouffe (1995) critiqued Young's view of a heterogeneous public that embodies diverse and distinct perspectives of oppressed or marginalized groups. For Mouffe, such understanding of citizenship deals with identities and interests that are formed outside of the realm of citizenship. Rather, Mouffe argued for a conceptualization of *radical democratic citizenship* that aims for "the construction of a common political identity that would create the conditions for the establishment of a new hegemony articulated through new egalitarian social relations, practices and institutions. This cannot be achieved without the transformation of existing subject positions" (p. 327). For Mouffe, change of social relations and practices cannot exist except through the transformation of existing subject positions emerging in dialogue among different oppressed groups in ways that involve the creation of new identities.

How is Agency Enacted Within a Collective Identity?

In questioning the identity of the citizen, we consider that women's engaged political participation as agents is important in their being defined as citizens (Narayan, 2007). Davies (2000) argued that we must consider women's participation as more than simply being involved. "It can be seen that democracy is not just about 'levels' of participation (as these were fairly high even in Nazi Germany) but about *how* we participate" (p. 289). Furthermore, Dietz (1985) suggested that participation in political dialogue as citizens creates "equals who render judgement on matters of shared importance, deliberate over issues of common concern and act in concert with each other" (p. 14). While women have been marginalized in liberal conceptualizations of citizenship, women have not been inactive, passive agents in the polity, but rather have defined their participation in ways that have challenged the individualistic and patriarchal nature of this conceptualization. Women's movements have been a "testing ground for democracy's most radical ideas" (Phillips, 1991, p. 2).

Furthermore, we consider that engaged political participation by women has been constructed in the collective in order to raise private issues into the public sphere. Feminist

activists have often chosen to identify in the collective, through campaigns and networks (Ackelberg, 1988; Dominelli, 2006; Scott, 2001).

> Women do not necessarily enter the public arena as 'individuals.' Networks and community associations develop from women's responses to issues that confront them not as isolated individuals but as members of households, and, more important, as members of the communities in which those households are embedded. (Ackelsberg, 1988, p. 303)

Women activist groups such as *Los Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* "have drawn on the symbolic power of the maternal to develop practices of citizenship that are widely viewed as feminine" (Jaggar, 2005, p. 5). *Los Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, a group of Argentinean women who meet regularly to discuss their concern with the disappearance of their sons during the dictatorship between 1976 and 1983, strategize ways for reunification with their children and seek responses from the state about their sons' disappearances. In this case, Jaggar highlights how women bring their personal concerns into the public political discourse and act to redefine their identity as citizens within the collective as they address issues of the private sphere within the public domain.

Similarly, Mouffe (1995) argued that, in the transformation of subjective identities in the political sphere, the public/private distinction does not disappear, but rather is constructed in a different way.

> The aim is to construct a 'we' as radical democratic citizens, a collective political identity articulated through the principle of democratic equivalence. It must be stressed that such a relation of equivalence does not eliminate difference – that would be simple identity. It is only insofar as democratic differences are opposed to forces or discourses which negate all of them that these differences are substitutable for each other. (p. 325)

Yuval-Davis (1993) recognized that engaging in the collective requires "keep[ing] one's own perspective on things while empathizing and respecting the others as well as being open to change and growth as a result of the encounter" (p. 11). She maintained that the empowerment of women in the collective involves the empowerment of self-knowledge and autonomy as women work together to determine policies concerning women.

In studying the work of other feminist groups, Werbner (1999) highlighted the ways in which women, within their collective identity,

> challenged established notions of civic legitimacy and created the conditions for the feminization of citizenship: the reconstitution of citizenship in terms of qualities associated with women's role as nurturers, carers and protectors of the integrity of the family and its individual members. (p. 221)

Werbner argued that the strength of this participation "has been to introduce new human qualities into the public sphere, and to define them as equally foundational in the legitimation of the political community" (p. 227).

Arnot and Dillabough (2000) theorized that the legitimation of the political needs to expand from the community to the classroom.

> Citizenship, as a concept, allows us access to the contested terrain of democracy and the very nature of democratic schooling. It also allows us to analyse, from a feminist perspective, critical educational policies as well as the discursive frameworks used by national and international agencies and to consider the impact of global developments more generally. As a concept, it is precisely what needs to be signified, since its very abstractness allows it to become the object of study and the focus of political action. (p. 16)

The role of citizenship education must be questioned in terms of how women can come to understand themselves as citizens enacting full participation in the public sphere. The validity of current mandated citizenship education to challenge universal citizenship is uncertain (Tupper, 2008a). Therefore, we argue that feminist citizenship education reconceptualizes citizenship to embody the human qualities introduced by feminist groups as they collectively identify as agents for change within their communities.

Methodology

In this interpretivist study, we sought to understand how identity and agency are conceptualized by examining "the meanings that can be sifted from a text" (Denzin, 1998, p. 322). Through content analysis of public documents written by and about the *Sisterhood,* we engaged in a qualitative study to "focus on meanings and interpretations in text" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 299). We began our study with qualitative methodological considerations of examining citizen and agency in the case of the *Garneau Sisterhood.* Data samples consisted of public information that reported the police and the *Garneau Sisterhood's* responses to the rapes in the Garneau area in the spring of 2008. Data sources included newspaper articles that featured information released by the police pertaining to the rapes and the *Garneau Sisterhood*. Additionally, we examined public information disseminated by the *Garneau Sisterhood* in their awareness campaign, including blog site entries, letters to the editor, posters and website materials. The period of data collection was delimited to media samples released between May 2008 and July 2009.

The data was analyzed through a process of content analysis, whereby we identified the data that appeared as meaningful in answering our questions (Sarantakos, 2005) about citizen and agency as related to the *Sisterhood* case. As we analyzed the data, we were interested in "the objective and subjective interpretations" (p. 307) of the *Sisterhood* case, and "in the way subjective meanings contrast with the latent structures of meaning" (p. 307) embedded in the text. Dependability of the research was addressed through sampling triangulation (Sarantakos, 2005), whereby multiple sources of media were used to collect data. Additionally, the presence of more than one investigator allowed us to address dependability by viewing "a particular point in research from more than one perspective" (p. 145). In examining this one particular case, we are not concerned with constructing generalizations, but rather seek to interpret the meanings of citizenship, identity and agency as they are embedded in the story of public data regarding the *Garneau Sisterhood.*

Case of The Garneau Sisterhood

After a series of three rapes in the Garneau area of Edmonton in the spring of 2008, the city police service warned women living in the area to take extra precautions by locking their doors and reporting suspicious activity to the authorities. Additionally, limited information was released about the cases and suspect; the police revealed only the information which would not interfere with the investigation of the case. The ages and residence of the victim were revealed and the suspect was described as a stocky man, between five feet eight inches and five feet 10 inches tall (Edmonton Police Service, 2008).

The police warning sparked the interest of an anonymous collective of citizens identifying themselves as the *Garneau Sisterhood*. The *Sisterhood* corresponded through a local newspaper to raise their concern about the nature of the police warning, and began a poster campaign to "reclaim safe spaces for women in the community."[2] In problematizing the police response, the *Sisterhood* argued that the onus for dealing with this issue should not be placed on the individual women in the community. Rather, they claimed responsibility for ending rape culture is associated with all citizens in the community by rejecting the behaviour of offenders.

One month later, the Edmonton Police Service announced a fourth sexual assault believed, by the police service, to be committed by the same offender. The police spokesperson was clear in her assertion that "women in Edmonton, especially the ones who live alone, [are] to be vigilant about locking their doors and their windows and securing their homes. At this time the suspect is still at large" (Gelinas, 2008, ¶10). Additionally the police service responded with further notices directed at the *Sisterhood*, warning against vigilanteism (Gelinas, 2008). A representative from the police force asserted, "mobilizing one's community is a good thing," (¶19) but continued by cautioning against "vigilanteism, where the public is going after or targeting or finding their own suspects" (¶19).

The *Sisterhood*, however, maintained that the series of rapes impacted the community and that articles and reports from the police fail to acknowledge "that in our current society, male violence is accepted, even encouraged. That we live in a toxic society where sex and violence are conflated. That trauma like this is psychologically oppressing an entire community of women" (Garneau Sisterhood, 2008, ¶7). Furthermore, the *Sisterhood* challenged the label of vigilante, stating, "We certainly aren't roaming the street with guns. But if putting up a show of solidarity and empowering women in our neighbourhood by challenging rape myths makes us vigilantes, then we will happily accept that label" (Garneau Sisterhood, n.d., ¶9).

The Relationship Between Collective Identity and Agency

In examining the case of the *Garneau Sisterhood*, we return to our questions as we consider, *"Who is the citizen?"* and *"How is agency enacted within a collective identity?"* Our purpose in asking these questions is to examine how collective identity and agency have emerged in the case of the *Sisterhood,* as we examine a case of citizenship that has materialized in a space close to our own place of living, attending school, and working.

The statements released by the police service position citizen safety and security as being located within the realm of the private sphere as they advocate for individuals, in this case vulnerable women, to remain vigilant as they lock their doors and secure their homes. In this

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[2] Retrieved from Garneau Sisterhood website, *Sisterhood's gonna get ya…*
(http://garneausisterhood.weebly.com/index.html)

sense, the response of the police service validates the rights of the individual, a key figure in liberal conceptualizations of citizenship. However, this empowerment of the individual is problematic when considering the power inherent in the state's masculinist response to demote the individual to dependent (Young, 2003), as minimal information is released to the public under the guise of protection. In this way, the "empowerment" of the individual to deal with safety issues can be interpreted as a façade that masks the ways that the state "adopts the stance of masculine protector, telling us to entrust our lives to them, not to question their decisions about what will keep us safe" (p. 9). The case of the *Garneau Sisterhood* illustrates that the positioning of agency of the individual serves to remove the agency of the very citizens the state aims to protect, as the issue of safety in the community is pushed into the liberal, disempowered, individual, private space.

However, the response of the *Sisterhood* to the police warnings indicates a significant tension in how the citizen might be understood. The *Garneau Sisterhood* challenged the liberal conception of individualism in their assertion that the issue of sexual assault is about power abuses against women, not about safety in staying at home.

> Locked doors do not protect women from their family members, partners, and dates. This is the context of violence that we, the Garneau Sisterhood, are seeking to address. We need to publicly denounce all perpetrators of sexual assault. Each of us in this city needs to ask ourselves what we can do to stop all rape, not just this particular rapist. (Garneau Sisterhood, n.d., ¶6)

The *Sisterhood* affirmed the importance of collective agency, rather than agency located in the public sphere of the individual, to deal with this issue of safety. The actions of the *Sisterhood*, as testing ground for democracy (Phillips, 1991), have resulted in a conflict between the assertion of protection by the state and the agency of a collective of citizens to bring issues of importance within their homes and communities to the public sphere. By arguing that sexual assault is a community issue to be debated in the public sphere, and by refusing to remain individual passive victims, but rather taking an active role in addressing a social injustice, the *Garneau Sisterhood* destabilized liberal understandings of identity of citizens as individuals who lack collective agency. The issue of agency cannot be excluded from the concept of citizenship (den Heyer, 2006), as the case of the *Sisterhood* illustrates.

Furthermore, the *Sisterhood's* questioning of the police practice of releasing minimal information about the suspect, by arguing for an empowered and informed community, further destabilized the protectionist power of the state.

> We're also questioning the police refusal to release specific information about the attacks. If something is happening to women in this community, why can't we have all the details? What would be the disadvantage of having an empowered and informed community? Why not use a strategy that could combat fear, rather than perpetuating it with vague, shadowy details under newspaper headlines that simply run up tallies of attacks as if there's nothing that we can do about it? (Garneau Sisterhood, n.d. ¶7)

This statement by the *Sisterhood* illustrates their conceptualization of agency as being distinctly embedded in the knowledge of the collective. The *Sisterhood* was clear in their assertion that their identity and agency in the collective was a source of empowerment. "We may feel powerless, but we are not powerless. The women in this neighbourhood are organizing. The Garneau Sisterhood is watching" (Garneau Sisterhood, 2008, ¶16).

The way in which the *Garneau Sisterhood* conceptualized citizenship as the relationship of collective identity and collective agency allowed them to challenge the dominant liberal notion of individual citizenship that served to disempower them as vulnerable women needing protection. The unity of the collective empowered the *Sisterhood* to have agency in validating their concerns as citizens. The power of collective identity and agency allowed the *Sisterhood* to engage as citizens in the public sphere as they challenged marginalized spaces of liberal democracy. In doing so, the *Sisterhood* repositioned power within the realm of the collective identity of citizen, within this collective group of women, as agents in constructing the knowledge needed for social change.

> The poster campaign is about shaping the space we live in or having a hand in defining our public spaces. Garneau is a community full of feminist women and when we walk down the street we wanted to be able to see and feel that. It's also about defining where we can get knowledge - in Garneau it exists on street lamps, on fire hydrants, and at bus terminals. (http://garneausisterhood.weebly.com/garneau-rapist.html)

In What Ways Might Feminist Citizenship Education Provide Agency for Marginalized Citizens to Participate as Active Members in the Democracy?

As the notion of citizenship is embedded within the constructs of democracy, we question how feminist citizenship education provides space for agency. Reflecting on the connection between democracy and education, Dewey (2004) theorized that education is a social process whereby students learn the practice of democracy through their understanding of the nature of identity and participation in society. He argued that a democratic society makes provision for participation from all its members "on equal terms" (p. 95). In theorizing about such a society, Dewey maintained that education in this society must give "individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (p. 95). In this way, Dewey theorized an education founded in both the connectedness of citizens and their empowerment to act for social change.

Similarly, Arnot and Dillabough (2000) asserted that schools striving to promote democracy must go beyond considerations of the curriculum to think carefully about issues of pupil organization, discipline practices, and procedures within the school, and to question, "What values and political issues would they wish to express and how within the institution as a whole?" (p. 14). Democratic schools are concerned with issues of decision-making that actively engage students and teachers with agency for social change. The notion of social change is important in citizenship education as it locates students in the present as agents in their own communities, and in the way they identify themselves in their communities (den Heyer, 2006).

Davies (2000) defined a democratic school as a space where equal rights and access to participation in decision-making occur. However, she extended the notion of space to envelope issues of gender power relations. "A democratic school, therefore, would have the mechanisms for both managing popular control and for monitoring whether there is equality of rights –

including gender equity" (p. 282). Davies continued to argue that teachers and students in democratic schools question the rights of individuals and examine how decisions "portray both women's power and their varied responses to political control" (p. 294) in looking at power relations in the context of civil society and schools. In doing so, Davies extended Dewey's conceptualization of education to include social processes of questioning power relations in women's citizenship rights. The emphasis for participation is not sufficient on its own; democratic education should consider how power could be used.

While the context of citizenship education provides "learning opportunities for students to understand the principles underlying a democratic society [and] … demonstrate a critical understanding of individual and collective rights" (Alberta Education, 2005, p.3), Arnot and Dillabough (2000) argued that citizenship education is often gendered in ways that further marginalizes, rather than emancipates, women. Traditional understandings of citizenship and democracy are often viewed as ungendered; however, liberal conceptualizations of citizenship that demote the citizen to dependent of the masculinist state (Young, 2003) must be confronted and recognized within citizenship education programs. Phillips (1991) argued that the notions of democracy and citizenship must be challenged in education as "engendered," with their "gendered assumptions exposed" (Arnot & Dillabough, 2000, p. 15). Tupper (2008b) argued that through universal constructs of citizenship education, differences become invisible.

> Arguably, where schools and curriculum fail, is in interrogation of the extent to which democratic institutions and individual relationships to them are inherently and systemically undemocratic. Further, liberal definitions of citizenship embedded in social studies disguise the false universalism of citizenship, in essence marginalizing individuals who find themselves simultaneously caught in the discourse while they are both marginal to it and produced as marginal by it. (p. 74)

In this context, Davies (2000) advocated for feminist citizenship education "to analyse educational institutions as micropolitical sites of power, to provide indicators of, and preconditions for, a gender-inclusive democratic institution and to confront major social issues such as conflict and violence and their relation to education" (p. 282).

In challenging power structures that serve to exclude women from citizenship, through feminist citizenship education and critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1980), Arnot and Dillabough (1999) argued that identities must be viewed as purposefully constructed within the discourse of democracy. The construction of identity must be challenged to deconstruct exclusive power hierarchies. By challenging the constructions of identity, feminist citizenship education can serve to provide a means of agency to girls and women, identify gendered constructions of citizenship, and disrupt the ways that this gendered construction constrains participation in public spaces. To do so, individuals must be able to realize their connectedness to the collective in which they are embedded. Participation is connected to identity, as an individual must "have a consciousness of him or her self as a member of a living community with a shared democratic culture" (McLaughlin, 1992, p. 236). Feminist citizenship education provides agency for those concerned with ways in which girls, and women, create space for active participation in constructing their own place in the democracy. It is "committed to the idea that women, as agents of knowledge (not foundationalist knowledge!), need to make claims about their identity in order to effect broad social and political change" (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999, p. 185). Feminist citizenship education

is grounded in the assumption that women, as citizens, should define their own identities as they strive to deal with issues of importance that are located in social justice and change.

In unique ways, stretching beyond the borders of citizenship education, feminist citizenship education provides space for gender-inclusive educators concerned with education for social change. Davies (2000) argued that

> a feminist citizenship programme for a school would include ensuring democratic structures of decision-making and participation and the tackling of rights and responsibilities through a formal curriculum. A 'gender-sensitive' curriculum is not one that simply depicts more females in textbooks. It is one that includes the vital political skills required to challenge gender and class relations. (p. 294)

Furthermore, the political skills gained through feminist citizenship education must include a specific focus on conflict and conflict resolution. Davies determined that "the skills of participating in the political process, such as advocacy, lobbying, and the different workings of representative and participatory democracy" (p. 294) are required. Tupper (2008a) argues that citizenship education is needed to "begin interrogating the commonsense, the discourse of democracy as accomplishment, the values of rationality and individuality, and citizenship as universal" (p. 82). Education that is designed to develop citizenship focused on social change will involve significant encounters of conflict and resistance. It is for this reason that feminist citizenship education is needed in schools to provide students of all genders with the tools to challenge injustice as they raise issues embedded in their community's well-being in the public sphere, respond to the conflict that arises as dominant ideologies are disrupted, and construct mechanisms for social change that acknowledge the collective identity and agency of citizens.

Implications for Practice and Research

The work of the *Garneau Sisterhood* aims to raise awareness and challenge theories of citizenship that constrain both citizen agency and identity. However, the *Sisterhood's* role in education is not yet realized. Women's social movements exhibit profound potential to influence citizenship education in schools in their local area. While social studies curricula often consider national and international movements in global citizenship education, there is space for the *Sisterhood* to interact at the K-12 and post-secondary level in teaching and education policy development. Pike (2008) argued, "because of the virtual nature of global citizenship, active local citizenship becomes even more *important*" (p. 81). The extent to which social movements would be welcomed within the constraints of neo-liberal ideologies in education is yet unknown. Therefore, both research and practice that explores the role of social movements in citizenship education programs in Canada is needed.

The work of feminist citizenship education for advocacy is connected to social movements, such as those of the *Garneau Sisterhood.* Like the *Sisterhood,* who argued, "We are not powerless," (Garneau Sisterhood, 2008, ¶18), citizenship education is concerned with active participation in the polity, challenging issues of power and reconstructing identity as citizens with agency for change. However, we feel it important to note that, while feminist social collectives such as the *Sisterhood* attempt to disrupt the liberal *meta-narrative of universal citizenship* (Tupper, 2008b), this movement can also be critiqued for the way it postures women as a homogenous entity. In feminist citizenship education, it is important for educators to construct a

notion of identify that recognizes difference, so women are "viewed as members of a heterogeneous community who are concerned with how new social and political formations (e.g., neo-liberalism) structure the relationship between gender and democratic education" (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999, p. 185). While the *Garneau Sisterhood* declared, "All women are us," (Garneau Sisterhood Poster), there is danger in misrepresenting the voices of all women when we enact collective agency and identity in our communities. The challenge for current feminist citizenship education, then, lies in acknowledging the diversity among women as they re-define their identity as citizens in the collective community. Mouffe (1995) was clear in her admonition that "an approach that permits us to understand how the subject is constructed through different discourses and subject positions is certainly more adequate than one that reduces our identity to one single position – be it class, race or gender" (p. 329). Such effort requires a focused commitment to dialogue, with and between community members, to ensure that the voices of all women continue to be heard, and not marginalized.

Finally, we are aware that our study of the data on the *Sisterhood* is limited to a particular time and space. However, the work of the *Sisterhood* continues, as we have recently observed a resurgence of posters in the Garneau area, whereby the *Sisterhood* seeks to engage the larger Garneau community in determining the community response to issues of sexual assault and safety. A deeper understanding of the relationship between social movements and the community needs to be explored in this case. In particular, a case study that examines how anonymous collective agency and identity are understood by the members of the *Garneau Sisterhood* would provide insight into the way that agents in social movements understand their own roles in challenging the constructs of citizenship. The collective identity of the *Sisterhood* is made more complex by their anonymity, and the implications of this complexity on the movement and its relationship with the community is not understood. Such knowledge would serve as a unique perspective in social movement literature in the Canadian context.

Conclusion

The *Sisterhood* is not only watching, but de-stabilizing the constraints of liberal citizenship. By challenging dominant notions of citizenship that constrain civic participation, feminist responses are redefining a *feminization of citizenship* (Werbner, 1999). The case of the *Garneau Sisterhood* illuminates the ways in which the enactment of collective identity and agency creates space for the empowerment of women to engage with issues of importance in the public sphere. As the *Sisterhood* claimed, women are not powerless; they are actively defining their own identities and spaces for agency in their communities.

Education focused on social change will involve significant encounters with conflict and resistance. The *Sisterhood* envisioned a space for shifting sources of knowledge in their community, recognizing the need for active engagement with controversial issues. Feminist citizenship education fosters the potential to empower students of all genders with the tools to challenge injustice, respond to conflict, and construct mechanisms for social change that acknowledge the collective identity and agency of citizens. Feminist citizenship education provides space for students to engage with the notion of collective identity and agency, and empower them to raise issues of importance in the public sphere.

The *Sisterhood* is not only watching; the acts of the *Sisterhood* are embedded in the agency of citizens to question, to challenge, to identify and to act as engaged citizens with full participation rights in the public sphere. Collective identity and agency, as understood through feminist citizenship education discourse, empowers all citizens to participate.

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