CITIZEN-GIRLS:
GIRLS’ PERSPECTIVES ON
GENDER, CITIZENSHIP AND SCHOOLING

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Doctor of Philosophy 2013
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Abstract

The voices, perspectives and experiences of girls and young women in history, political and civic education remain rare, and those of girls of color are even rarer still. This dissertation reports on the results of a qualitative study exploring girls’ perspectives on and experiences of citizenship in the Toronto area. Through the use of document analysis, semi-structured interviews; and photovoice, this study suggests that the girls easily identify traditional gendered expectations in their families, schools and in the society at large. At the same time, the girls often make deliberate choices to defy these expectations, carve out their own paths, and serve as advocates for gender equality, social justice and engaged citizenship. This study focuses on the voices of girls and the ways in which concepts of gender enhance, shape and inhibit civic action within schooling. Despite an increased emphasis on education for active citizenship in education more broadly, this study provokes serious questions about what girls are learning about their roles in society and how concepts of gender affect the ways young people understand and enact their citizenship roles.

There are new fields of research in the areas of youth civic engagement, citizenship education, feminist and girlhood studies, all of which informed my understanding of these ‘citizen-girls’, however they still often remain separated and inadequately consider the intersections of multiple identity factors as well as the relationship between individual
agency and the societal structures that construct dominant values. This study has important implications for educators and policymakers, suggesting a need for more spaces and opportunities both within the classroom, and outside the school, for girls and boys to critically engage with the messaging they receive about gender, democratic participation and citizen engagement. Furthermore, these girls’ experiences also suggest that we must broaden our definition of citizenship and civic participation in order to better reflect the myriad new forms of citizen expression being used by girls and young people in modern societies today.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1
Introduction

What Am I?

This is a poem written by “Mihika”, a participant in Project Citizen-Girl. This poem was written for a culminating activity to the study where the girls displayed their photos and the early findings of the research project at the University of Toronto.

| Weak and passive | Or am I intelligent | You see me |
| Weak and passive | Simple | You make me |
| Afraid to take a stand | Yet | You tell me |
| Never assertive | Confident | What am I? |
| Or am I brave | You need me | Tell me |
| Strong and bold | What am I? | What am I? |
| Dynamic | You take me | And tell me why |
| Not foretold | You tell me | Give me answers |
| You see me | What am I? | Answers for clarity |
| You know me | Skinny and tall | Not for my gender |
| You tell me | Gentle and mellow | But for whom I am |
| What am I? | Perfect above all | Tell me |
| Inept and incompetent | Or am I unique | What am I? |
| Easy | and rare | |
| But dependent | Diverse | |
| | And aware | |
Demanding that girls be considered not only changes what is studied, but it challenges the existing disciplines politically. Girls have not been omitted through forgetfulness or mere prejudice. The structured examination of most academic disciplines contributes actively to the production and perpetuation of gender hierarchies. (Bach, 1993, p. 7)

Figure 1. An image of the girls’ photographs at the Project Citizen Girls exhibit at the University of Toronto, June 20, 2011.
Introduction

In today’s globalized, hypersexualized and media-saturated world, girls in Canada face a panoply of complex challenges as they grow into adult women. In Mihika’s poem, we see the multiplicity and contradictions inherent in girls’ evolving identities and how they develop their roles in the larger society as individuals, as women, and as citizens. We recognize the tension that she, like many other young women, must face: to develop a healthy sense of self, to negotiate gendered expectations of family, community and society; to cope with a societal fixation on women’s bodies; and to navigate through a contradictory relationship with schooling and structures of citizenship. They must learn how to fit in, while also developing their own individual identities and lives. Girls are often positioned as sex objects, political subjects, high achieving students, guardians of family honour, and agents of change in their schools and communities.

In Canada, as in many other wealthy countries, girls are given space in public discourse as consumers, gaining increasing attention by corporations, nonprofits, international agencies, NGOs and media outlets. Moreover, recent research has emerged focusing on girls’ academic success and prompting many to argue that girls are the success story of the past two decades, while in comparison, boys are in crisis (Bettis & Adams, 2009). At the same time, girls are excluded from citizenship spaces and debates because, as minors, they are unable to participate in formal political structures (Taft, 2011). As girls enter adulthood, they must develop their emerging adult identities and positions as citizens through a web of messages related to race, gender, class, cultural identity and sexual orientation. In addition, they must find their places in Canadian society as female-citizens in part through the lens of schooling, where they learn the ‘official’ story of Canadian history, society and citizenship, which is the knowledge, values and behaviours that the government believes all citizens should acquire to be a female citizen in society. Despite the fact that studies suggest many girls are active participants in their schools and communities, girls' citizen participation and activism are often marginalized in the literatures on girlhood, social movements and citizenship (Taft, 2011). For instance, recent works reveal a myriad of new forms of girls’ civic expression through digital, online methods and new media (Evans, 2005; Plyer, 2005; Taft, 2011). Girls and women are still expected to take on different roles from boys and men
within their families, schools and communities, a relationship which is largely underexplored in the mainstream theorizing and research on citizenship.

The exclusion or marginalization of girls’ learning of “gender” within the theorizing, teaching, and learning of citizenship in schools is not an unfortunate omission, nor is it immaterial to the ways that young people learn to conceive of their own participation in society. Indeed, it is absolutely central to the ways that they view themselves and the ways that they negotiate intimacy, relationships with others, and the ways they view their participation in school, professional life and society more broadly. The messages that girls and boys get about how they are expected to act, behave, dress, talk, and relate to others affects all aspects of their lives.

The term “girl” is problematic for a number of important reasons and is often used by men to infantalize grown women and dismiss the concerns of feminists. It has taken on new meanings, both positive and negative, such as “girl power”, “you throw like a girl”, “good girl”, or “you go girl”. In fact, the United Nations defines a girl as a female under the age of 18 and in 2012 designated October 11th the International Day of the Girl Child (Finney, 2007). Despite the fact that girlhood is often described as if it were a universal experience, girls’ experiences vary widely based on a complex mix of social identities and societal factors. Thus, I wanted to explore these girls’ lives and their shared experiences as girls, while recognizing that their experiences are shaped by multiple factors including race, socioeconomic status, religion, geography, sexuality. In addition, the participants in this study were between the ages of 14 to 18, no longer children and therefore not really girls. However, I choose to use this term despite my concerns because it came from the name of the Plan Canada groups to which all these young participant-researchers belong Because I am a Girl (BIAAG) and the Girls Speakers’ Bureau (GSB). These groups are designed to raise public awareness of girls’ rights, girls’ education and gender equality. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, this group of young female participants actively use the term “girl” to describe themselves as they navigate the transition from adolescence to adulthood. For the purposes of this study, I will use the terms girls and young women interchangeably.
In my thesis, I will examine a number of simultaneous yet contradictory trends that are shaping our understanding of girls and their relationship to education and citizenship. (a) Girls empowerment is a good investment: Girls and girls’ education are increasingly positioned as a good investment by a mix of educators, international development agencies, NGOs, and corporations (Annan, 2004; Clinton, 2010; World Bank, 2010; Plan Canada, 2011). (b) Girls are good-students—Boys are in crisis: Within the North American context and much of the Global North, girls are viewed as the success story of the past few decades in direct contrast with boys, who are positioned as being in crisis (Bettis & Adams, 2007, 2009; Foster, 1999, 2000; Ringrose, 2007). Much educational research has been concentrated on improving boys’ literacy, school achievement and general interest in schooling. (c) Girl power not gender - Largely because of the discourse of girls’ academic success, the examination of the representation of gender within education has resulted in a shift away from a critical examination of the ways gender is being constructed within education and society more broadly (Taft, 2011). (d) Girlhoods in flux: At the same time that many researchers concerned with gender have concentrated on boys, there has been an emergence of the new field of girlhood studies, recognizing the need to distinguish girls from both boys and adult women as well as the need to examine diversity and difference within the category of “girls” (Finney, 2007; Jiwani, Steenbergen, & Mitchell, 2006; Pipher, 1998, Walkerdine, 1991; Wiseman, 2003). (e) Girls excluded from citizenship; Finally, I will argue that in spite of positive developments for girls and young women and the growing recognition of them as a valid area of empirical and theoretical work, girls are still most often treated as irrelevant to the teaching and learning of citizenship and civic participation (Bach, 1998; Finney, 2007; Taft, 2011). Thus, I am situating this study and the experiences of these seven girls within these larger trends framing the construction of girl-citizens.

In this study, I worked with seven girls aged between 14-18, all of who were from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and were members of Plan Canada’s Girls’ Speakers Bureau (GSB). The GSB is a youth group where young women get mentoring and training in a range of areas, including advocacy, leadership, and public speaking. In addition, they participate in a range of events and have access to “expert” conversations and current research about issues facing girls in Canada and globally. The girls were not selected to join the organization, but rather joined out of their own personal interest in girls’ rights and gender equality. They are
not the average 15-year-old. They have access to conversations, current research and open discussions about girls and gender equality that most young people do not. In addition, because of the GSB program, they have been exposed to many girlhood experts, politicians, community activists and nonprofit leaders who have likely impacted their views. They were not recruited by any organization but joined the GSB out of their individual desire to learn more and participate actively in work to support girls’ rights and gender equality. I will describe both Plan Canada and the GSB in more detail in my methodology chapter.

Over the course of a year, I worked with them as they explored their own complex identities as they relate to their own learning of citizenship and civic participation. The project was aimed at looking at identity, gender and citizenship through the perspectives of a diverse group of girls. Thus, it was framed with the general question: what can we learn about notions of citizenship and civic participation through the experiences of a group of girls? To do this, I used qualitative and participatory arts-based methods (focus groups, semi-structured interviews and photography) to address the central research questions:

1. What are young girls learning about their roles as citizen-girls in Canada?

2. How do their complex, multiple identities affect their understanding and enactment of citizenship?

3. What is the relationship between what girls learn with the private sphere (i.e. family, home) and the public sphere (outside the home, formal politics)? How is gender constructed in these spaces and how does it relate to their notions of citizen participation?

I will examine the experience of a group of “citizen-girls”¹ in Canada by exploring the lives of Andrea², Jane, Janice, Macy, Michelle, Mihika, and Priya, the seven young

¹ Throughout this thesis, I will signal the use of terms invented by myself or other scholars through the use of double quotations. I will use these quotation marks the first time I use the term.

² These are pseudonyms chosen by the girls to represent their ethnocultural backgrounds.
women who participated in my study, which came to be known as Project Citizen-Girl. These girls come from a variety of neighborhoods around the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), all attend different schools and participate in a range of activities which include: school community service clubs, dance, sports, school environmental clubs, BIAAG school clubs, V-Girl feminist book club, and Free the Children clubs. Their notions of citizenship and civic participation are complex, multidimensional, contextual, self-consciously evolving and are shaped by what they are learning about their own gendered, raced, and classed identities. While they show incredible creativity, resistance, agency and adaptability, these young women also reveal the strong influence of dominant social forces that shape their lives.

**Study Rationale**

**Girls, Gender Equality and Education in a Global Context**

While there is little doubt that life for millions of girls and women around the globe has improved in the past 50 years, recent measures estimate that approximately 70% of the world’s extreme poor are girls and women, and less than 18% of the world’s legislators are women (UNIFEM, 2012). While there is some debate about the accuracy of this estimate, there is no doubt that girls and young women are among the members of society most affected by global economic and political pressures. Girls and young women remain a major source of cheap and unpaid labour within the developing world and since they lack institutional power and voice, they are often most vulnerable to the fluctuations of the global economy and international pressures (United Nations, 1995).

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing consensus among policymakers, educators and international organizations that investing in girls and women is one of the most important social investments (Kelly, 1982). A range of leaders, including Hillary Clinton and Kofi Annan, have spoken publicly to advocate for further investment in girls’ education and other programs supporting girls’ and young womens’ greater inclusion in society (Clinton, 2012). In January of 2004, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan admitted that he believed that: “when it comes to solving many of the problems of this world,
I believe in girl-power” (Annan, 2004, para 21). The World Bank (2010) describes the importance of investing in girls and women:

Why Girls’ Education? The inter-linkages between gender inequalities, economic growth and poverty are the main reasons why girls’ education is a smart investment. For developing countries to reap these benefits fully, they need to unleash the potential of the human mind. Educating all their people, not just half of them, makes the most sense for future economic growth. Systematic exclusion of women from access to schooling and the labor force translates into a less educated workforce, inefficient allocation of labor, lost productivity, and consequently diminished progress of economic development. Evidence across countries suggests that countries with better gender equality are more likely to have higher economic growth. (World Bank, 2010, para. 5)

Thus, educating and empowering girls is constructed as a good investment, appealing in particular to those individuals and governments that may not be prioritizing girls and gender equality. However, the discourses that dominate education and educational research related to gender frame gender inequality in problematic and dichotomous ways. Within the international development agencies, NGOs and global institutions, there is a growing argument that increasing girls’ access to education will lead to an improved performance on a range of social and development indicators including: greater gender inequality in society, health outcomes and economic development (Annan, 2004; Plan Canada, 2010; United Nations, 2010; World Bank, 2010;). In the 1990s, the United Nations declared it the Decade of the Girl, while 2010 heralded the first G20 Girls Summit held in Toronto. Finally, in 2012, the United Nations declared October 11th as the International Day of the Girl Child, to recognize the continued importance of supporting girls’ education and policies and programs that support expanded possibilities for girls and young women around the globe.

While a global effort to expand girls’ educational access dominates the educational landscape in the Global South, in the Global North there has been an increased focus on girls’ empowerment in both popular media and research, leading to a number of “girl power” initiatives among NGOs, community organizations and education organizations. There has been an emergence of “Girl Power”, “Alpha” and “Gamma Girls” (Sessions Step, 2002), all exploring a new kind of girl, the academically successful girl, the modern, future-oriented
girl (Kindlon, 2006) and the bitchy, bullying girl (Wiseman, 2003). At the same time, and perhaps related to the focus on girls in the area of education and scholarly research, there has been a growing interest among private companies, the corporate sector and media organizations, resulting from the realization that girls, and tweens in particular are a powerful commercial force in North America (Taft, 2011). In effect, many efforts at harnessing the power of girls treats them as achiever-consumer-citizens and defines their participation in terms of their purchasing power. “They continue to appear in both the public and academic domains only as occasional images – as visual objects rather than as intellectual political subjects” (Taft, 2011, p. 5).

Many contributions that girls and women make to their families, schools and communities are often ignored and overlooked by researchers, educators and policymakers. These activities might include tutoring a younger student, helping with siblings or other household contributions, many of which might fall exclusively on girls. Perhaps this kind of participation is often ignored because it is taken for granted that girls and young women will participate in these ways. At the same time, new forms of citizen expression, such as digital activities like blogging, video-sharing, online petitions or online organizing might also get ignored by many researchers because they do not fit the more accepted definitions of citizenship. To date, girls do not yet have an organized, powerful collective voice to look out for their interests, though one may be emerging (Plan Canada, 2012).

In fact, while this research was being completed, several of the participants in my study spoke at the Canadian Parliament on behalf of an advocacy campaign to get the United Nations to declare an International Day of the Girl Child (United Nations, 2011). The year 2012 will be the first year with a day dedicated to girls’ rights and issues around the globe (McCarney, 2012). In spite of these significant achievements, much of the current literature on citizenship, youth activism and civic engagement (and indeed the teaching of citizenship in schools), does not include these efforts. Indeed, as Jessica Taft argues in her 2011 book entitled RebelGirls, there is limited empirical work examining girls’ notions of citizenship, civic engagement patterns and activism and how their identities relate to their engagement in civic and political life (Taft, 2011). Moreover, much of this work does not take up criticisms made by feminists, critical race or post-colonial scholars, nor does it adequately explore the
relationship between the learning of citizenship and the emerging body of literature on
girlhood (Kindlon, 2006; Pipher, 1998; Tao & Mitchell, 2010; Walkerdine, 1991; Wiseman,
2003).

As Taft (2011) argues, there are now “countless organizations, books, websites and
after-school programs around the world that state their mission is to ‘empower girls’” (Taft,
2011, p 23). In Canada, there are a range of girl-focused programs including: the Plan
Canada because I am a Girl program, the Girl Guides of Canada, The YWCA, and the Young
Women on the Move program of the Toronto District School Board. Girls are becoming
symbols of the successes of capitalism, family honour, cultural survival and socioeconomic
success. The “image of the girl is frequently deployed as a model for the ‘appropriate ways to
embrace and manage the political, economic and social conditions of contemporary societies’
and an indicator of the supposed potential benefits of global capitalism” (Taft, 2010, p. 6).
The key question, as Taft suggests, is: how do these organizations define what it means to
“empower girls”? Which girls are they empowering, and to what ends?

While these measures promise great new opportunities for girls, there are a number of
important discourses that need to be examined further. It is important to note also that a
“universal girlhood”, like a universal citizenship, erases the complexity and diversity that
shapes girls’ lives (Finney, 2007). Finney (2007) suggests that dominant notions of girls and
girlhood focus on White, heterosexual, Anglo-Saxon girls’ experiences, erasing the
experiences of many girls and rendering them more vulnerable to the rising tide of neo-
liberal discourses, policies and practices that mediate girlhood and treat them all the same
(Finney, 2007, p. 2). In addition, many of these global efforts are focused on improving
access and retention for girls and less concentrated on a critical examination of gender, ideas
of masculinity and femininity, and the impact on citizen participation. In contrast, within the
Global North, and indeed in Canada, education has been dominated by a different framing of
gender inequality.

Regardless of the growing concern for girls and the emergence of girlhood studies,
the relationship of girls with citizenship and education for citizenship remains at best tenuous
and highly contested. While there are some international studies that examine gender and
citizenship (Hahn et al., 2007; Hahn, 1996), or the most part, girls and are rarely considered within the literature and the formal teaching and learning of citizenship within formal schooling. They are viewed as irrelevant to serious debates about what it means to be a citizen and the impact of their complex, multiple and intersectional identities are rarely considered in the theorizing of citizenship. These debates about girls, gender roles and their participation in society are not just a theoretical exercise between academics and educators. Even in a comparatively egalitarian country, the marginalization and exclusion of girls and women have serious implications for girls’ self-confidence, health, education, income, professional and personal lives and the larger society as well.

**Canada’s Reputation vs. Reality**

While a debate rages about ethnocultural diversity, individual rights and the role of education in the U.K., France and elsewhere in the world, many Canadians congratulate themselves on their egalitarian values and progressive education system. The majority of Canadians believe their society and schools are largely immune to the gender, race and class hierarchies that are often described in other pluralistic democracies. The Canadian national identity is portrayed as being more flexible, and open-minded, and does not impose a one-size-fits-all image of a “good Canadian”, on the basis of language or culture of origin. Moreover, Canada is unique because of the degree to which it celebrates different cultures and has embraced into our national culture the idea of anti-discrimination, equality and tolerance (Valpy, 2005). Canada is often viewed as a world leader in balancing gender equality and cultural diversity, and at the recent G20 summit in Toronto, Canada led a global effort to invest in girls’ education and maternal and child health (CBC, 2010; Woods, 2012). Others cite national surveys revealing that a large majority of Canadians have positive attitudes towards gender equality and the greater representation of women throughout society (Bashevkin, 2009).

Nevertheless, current research suggests that many obstacles still prevent the active and equal participation of girls and women of all backgrounds in civic and political life in Canada and that the reportedly progressive attitudes towards gender equality have not translated into major changes to civic and political structures Bashevkin, 2009). Additionally,
visible minority and First Nations women are still highly underrepresented in Canadian political structures and processes (Bashevkin, 2009). Furthermore, the dominant “imaginary” reproduced in Ontario’s schools is that Canada is a diverse, gender-equitable, multicultural democracy with a long history of participation of women from all racial, ethnocultural backgrounds and regions (Razack, Smith, & Thobani, 2010). Official statements by the Canadian Federal Government state explicitly that: “Canada is a world leader in the promotion and protection of women’s rights and gender equality” (Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012). It is important, then that research is done to fully examine these claims and investigate the lives of all girls and women to assess the reality of their lives and the issues they continue to face because of gender.

In fact, Canada has actually fallen in a global ranking of gender equality. In 2011, it ranked 36th in the world in terms of gender parity in formal politics, placing it behind Bangladesh, Mozambique and the Phillipines (Hausman et al., 2011). Thus, Bashevkin argues (2009), “there is a gap between rhetoric and raw data” (Bashevkin, 2009, p. 26). Within the North American context, the focus of both research and public discourse has shifted away from girls, away from a critical examination of gender bias in educational structures and formal curricula, and the connection to inequality in the society at large. Over the past decade, debates about the perceived crisis in boys have raged throughout the Global North. A number of scholars have resisted the binarism of pitting boys against girls and the assumption that schools are feminized (Foster, 1996; Martino, 2008; Ringrose, 2007). For example Foster (1996) argues that claims that schools favor girls are “exaggerated” and wrong-headed. She goes on to argue that in fact, school curricula in Australia continue to devalue the private, ignore the gendered nature of the private/public divide, and exclude discussion of the continued gender inequality after and outside of school. Martino (2008) points out that it is not so useful to compare all boys against all girls, and in fact it is more important to examine the intra-group diversity instead because it is greater than between the sexes.

In spite of these debates, many researchers, educators and policymakers in Canada have coalesced around the argument that the school environment favors girls, resulting in boys falling behind in schools (Newsweek, 2008, The Globe & Mail, 2010). “Canadian
research is now exploring how a media driven ‘perception among some parents/guardians and educators that boys in school are being shortchanged’ is being taken up by Government organizations responsible for education with as yet unforeseen effects” (Davison et al., 2004, in Ringrose, 2007, p. 476). Building on a major report conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Europe, In 2011, the Globe and Mail conducted a six-part report entitled: *Failing Boys*. It found:

Data suggests that boys, as a group, rank behind girls by nearly every measure of scholastic achievement. They earn lower grades overall in elementary school and high school. They trail in reading and writing, and 30 per cent of them land in the bottom quarter of standardized tests, compared with 19 per cent of girls. Boys are also more likely to be picked out for behavioural problems, more likely to repeat a grade and to drop out of school altogether. (The Globe & Mail, 2011, para. 1)

As Chapman described: “Boys have never been in more trouble…They account for 70% of the Ds and Fs that teachers dole out. They make up two thirds of the students labeled as disabled…and they account for 80% of high school dropouts (Mulrine, 2001, in Chapman, Undated). Prompted by research results indicating problems with boys’ academic performance in school, the Ontario Ministry of education mounted a series of initiatives to raise the achievement of boys including: *The Road Ahead, The Boys’ Literacy Teacher Inquiry Project* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) and *Me Read? And How?* Ontario teachers report on how to improve boys' literacy skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). In many industrialized countries, girls have been reported as consistently receiving higher grades and test scores on a range of standardized assessments, leaving many to conclude that these gender differences are a result of an overly feminine educational environments (Hoff Summers, 2000).

In addition to often positioning girls against boys in the characterization of gender in the educational context in Canada, it is also often described as merely a problem “over there”, or “over there, over here” (Jiwani, 2011, p. ix), or within certain racialized minority communities in Canada (Jiwani, 2011). In fact, while the government led the charge for more investment overseas in girls’ education and maternal and child health, it simultaneously closed 12 out of 16 Status of Women offices around the country and cut finding for programs
related to gender equality in Canada (Canadian Labour Congress, 2011). In addition, in a 2010 Citizenship guide for adult immigrants to Canada, produced by the Federal Government, the contradiction and dichotomized view of “the gender issue” is clearer. While the guide explicitly states gender equality as a core Canadian value, it goes on to attribute it to Canada’s British Anglo-Saxon heritage and warns that “Canada’s openness and generosity do not extend to barbaric cultural practices” (Canadian Citizenship and Immigration, 2010). It frames gender inequality as merely a issue within certain immigrant communities and not within mainstream Canadian society, a perspective that is all too commonly shared by students, teachers and policymakers alike. This particular framing of gender equality distracts us from focusing on how gender inequality continues to be reproduced in Canadian schools, citizenship structures and society at large.

**Education for Democratic Citizenship in Canada:**

**What Gets included?**

In many countries, including Canada, there is a growing preoccupation with citizenship and how education can promote citizen participation (Blais, 2008; Shareka & Sears, 2006; Davies & Evans 2002; Evans et al., 2009; Hebert & Sears, 2002; Hodgetts, 1968; Hughes, 2008; Hughes et al., 2010; Llewellyn & Westheimer. 2009; Mclean; 2010, forthcoming; Osbourne, 1999, 2000, 2004; Peck, 2009; Westheimer, 2004; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Since Hodgett’s landmark study of Canadian citizenship in 1968, there have been limited studies on an equally large scale, while at the same time, an increasing number of scholars and practitioners interested in what it means to prepare young people for citizen roles in Canada. Global forces, such as migration, economic crisis, concerns about terrorism and security, as well as the emergence of global institutions and international activist networks, are problematizing traditional notions of citizenship and raising questions about what it means to belong and participate in Canadian society. At the same time, there have been decades of feminist theorizing examining the relationship of citizenship and citizenship learning to women and gender, as well as a growing literature on “girlhoods” (Harris, 2004; Kindlon, 2004; Taft, 2010;). In spite of these multiple trends, the voices, perspectives and experiences of girls and young women in history, political and civic education in Canada are few, and those of girls of color are even rarer still.
There is increased theorizing and research about Canadian citizenship education, including Civics and Social Sciences curricula (Chareka & Sears, 2006; Davies & Evans 2002; Evans et al., 2009; Hebert & Sears, 2002; Hughes, 2008; Hughes et al, 2010; Llewellyn & Westheimer, 2009; Osbourne, 1999, 2000, 2004; Peck, 2009; Strong-Boag, 1996; Westheimer, 2004; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). There are significant local and provincial policies, programs and curriculum guidelines designed to promote active and engaged citizenship in Ontario, regardless of race, gender or cultural background (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2005; Toronto District School Board, 2012). However, there are many scholars who argue convincingly that the concepts being promoted are too narrowly defined, unrealistic and problematic, ignoring the complex identities of many young Canadian girls. In fact, Tupper points out that existing curricula in Canada the curriculum does not provide an interrogation of citizenship as a gendered construct (Tupper, 2002).

If citizenship is defined purely as participation within the public sphere and ignores the relationship of the private to the public, it ignores how the gendered roles that girls and boys play within the private sphere affect their participation within the public sphere. In addition, girls’ academic success and a strong focus on issues of ethnocultural diversity in education may be leading to a shift away from a comprehensive examination of how gender and sexuality are represented in schools and educational curricula (Riviere, 2005).

However popular, these concepts play a prominent role in much formal citizenship learning in schools, but have also generated a growing number of critiques from scholars (Foster, 1999, 2000; Lister, 1997, 2003; Mirza, 2000). Furthermore, there is often limited attention in much of the citizenship literature to how the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, culture and geography affects how girls understand and engage with what they are learning about their citizen roles in Canada. Other studies suggest that despite major strides to address gender inequality in Canada, our schools continue to reproduce racialized, heteronormative, traditional notions of femininity and gender roles which result in the continued exclusion and minimization of the lives and contributions of girls, especially racialized minority girls (Bach 1998; Bashevkin, 2009, 2010; Bickmore, 1997; Finney 2003).
Considering Canada’s increasingly diverse population, low rates of women’s participation in formal politics and rising concerns about civic apathy, it is an opportune moment for an examination of how young people are learning their citizenship roles and what messages they are getting about gendered expectations. With increasing pressures from neo-liberal policies in education emphasizing narrowing definitions of school achievement and citizenship, scholars argue that ignoring how gender and racial identity privileges certain citizens over others, further widens “citizenship gaps” and distracts people from continued systemic barriers and the reproduction of inequality based on race, class, gender or sexuality, while simultaneously promising equal access for all citizens to citizenship structures and processes (Jubas, 2006). Finally, in spite of the growing literature and practical preoccupation with theories of citizenship and citizenship in education, there is still a need for more empirical research on gender, citizenship and education (Arnot & Dillabough, 2000, 2007; Bernard-Powers, 2008; Lister, 1997, 2003; Taft, 2011). Thus, despite the decades of feminist theorizing and the rise of girlhood studies and post-colonial critiques of citizenship, the teaching and learning of citizenship in the school context remains to some degree unresponsive to these critiques. These trends provoke the question: What are young women learning in school about their roles in Canadian society and how does their citizenship learning relate to their complex, gendered identities (in particular, their roles as females)? Are there gaps or overlaps between what they are learning about being a citizen, and what they are learning about being a female?

**Girls and Education:**

**Transformation or Reproduction?**

With the rise of the nation-state, formal mass schooling became the means for preparing individuals to become active members of the country, to adopt appropriate national values, and to develop a sense of membership in the new society (Bickmore, 2008; Giroux, 2005; Schwille & Amadeo, 2002). In this context, education was viewed as the key way for governments of diverse, colonial peoples to prepare all citizens to “display enthusiastic loyalty to the state” (Heater, 1990, p. 76).
More recently, schooling is widely portrayed as the means to empowerment and the key way for young women to have more control over their lives, challenge gender inequalities in society and carve out more access to decision-making and power. In Canada, the rise of neo-liberal policies and a significant shift in the political climate has shifted focus away from an examination of systemic barriers by promising equal opportunity for all citizens, heralding school as the key to empowerment and spreading the idea that citizenship is an individual choice (Jubas, 2006). Along with the widespread concept that schooling leads to empowerment is the related notion that individual success and position in life is a result of making the right choices, not of how societal structures position individual citizens. Thus, for girls, being successful in civic and political life is a matter of studying hard, doing well and not threatening dominant social values related to gender and citizenship. If girls do not accomplish what they desire, do they then attribute it to their own personal failure?

In spite of this continued view of education being equitable for all students, decades of research highlight the many ways that formal schooling reproduces the dominant values of society, rewarding students of the dominant groups and excluding others, forcing them to begin in school at a severe academic disadvantage (Arnot & Dillabough, 2007; Bourdieu, 1973; Kerry & Vincent, 2003; Preece 2003; Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 2005). Cummins (1996) argues that despite public policy rhetoric that claims to treat all individuals equally, the macro-relations of power in society (related to race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) are reproduced in the language, setup and discourse of the micro-interactions in schools, between teachers and students. Bourdieu’s work illustrated how a series of codes, symbols and practices, known as habitus, served to replicate the values and beliefs of the dominant members of society (Bourdieu, 1973). Furthermore, he argued that this process of social reproduction is most prevalent in institutions and situations connected to the creation of a national identity, such as education for citizenship, because governments want to create allegiance to the state and protect the life of the nation (Dillabough, 2003). This process is also true in the case of a province, much like Ontario. Many scholars now argue that this process of social reproduction is true for gender relations in society (Arnot & Dillabough, 2007; Dillabough, 2003; Foster, 2007; Sankofa, 2004).
Although some may still contend that education should be neutral, it is inherently a political process, designed to influence the beliefs and actions of people. In addition, it is socially constructed through people and processes to establish social norms, values and procedures related to the values of society (Apple, 2004; Bickmore, 2006; Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 2005). This complex process of the social reproduction has serious implications for how people “succeed”, some at the expense of others. In schooling, official curriculum is a representation of what the dominant society values as essential knowledge, skills and behaviours for all its citizens. Curriculum has been and is used to describe different aspects of the learning that takes place inside the school context, from the Planned curriculum, to the enacted curriculum (or that implemented by teachers), and finally, the experienced curriculum (Lovat & Smith, 2003; Marsh, 2007) or the actual experience of the students). The work of Apple (1971, 2004) and others like Giroux (2005), illustrated the effect of the hidden curriculum, the implicit messages sent to students from the actions and behavior of their teachers and school staff that legitimize dominant social values and extend well beyond the stated curriculum (Apple, 1971).

Despite the still widespread notion that education is the means for young people to overcome gender or race-based discrimination, there is much evidence to suggest that in fact, it has a limited effect on changing gender roles in society (Kane, 1995) and may actually be shortchanging girls (Sadker & Sadker, 1980, 1994; Sankofa, 2004). Weiler (1988) cites research suggesting that many girls still see school as a means to resist race, class and gender oppression in society despite the fact that it is an androcentric process. Another study done in the Netherlands reveals that although young people confirmed their belief in the idea of male/female equality, they strongly resisted discussing existing barriers to achieving gender equality. In addition, girls did not identify with the discussion of feminism, and thought of it as old-fashioned and irrelevant to their modern lives. The young women argued that the battle for gender equality had already been won and viewed modern feminists as “complainers” (Volman & Ten Dam, 1998, p. 543). The results were consistent with other studies done in the U.S. showing how young girls and women were unaware of how social gender inequalities were reproduced in curriculum, literature and the school context (Sankofa, 2004). Studies in the U.S. (Weiler, 1998) and U.K. (Mirza & Reay, 2000) among
girls of African origins reveal that they believe that obtaining credentials is a sign of their own competence and their ability to rise above inequalities.

Scholars have found that many young women are resistant to identify with feminism and have learned to believe that gender inequality is a thing of the past, or as a problem only in certain cultures and communities. Sankofa and others (Hahn, 1998; Volman & Ten Dam, 1998; Weiler, 1988), found that students were to a large part unaware of how sexism and racism play out in their schools and societies. If young women are not aware of continued gender and racial inequality, they are not able to challenge them. As Lister (2008) pronounced, the first step to challenging gender inequality is for women to become aware that exclusion is an injustice and that things can change (Meer & Seven 2004, p. 29, in Lister, 2008). If girls are taught that gender and racial inequality have been “solved”, then how will they rationalize the marginalization or exclusion of women and people of color from public life?

Constructing Girls in Curriculum:

Bias, Marginalization and Exclusion

Education scholars have documented gender bias in the curriculum and content of schooling in North America, even within a framework supposedly committed to diversity (Bernard-Powers, 2008; Chapman, n.d.; Coulter, 1996; Weiler, 1988). Girls and boys do not enter school without identity: they are gendered bodies long before they set foot in a school. Gilligan, Lyons and Hammer (1990), reminded us that girls begin school as “feminized bodies”. First, some point out that public education ignores the long history of women’s movements and feminism in education for citizenship, or marginalizes it to the margins of curriculum (Bernard-Powers, 2008; Lister, 1997). In addition, women’s roles in society, largely relegated to the private sphere, are minimized and marginalized in schooling (Bernard-Powers, 2008).

Bernard-Powers (2008) found that women are largely absent from textbooks and that their historic roles within the private sphere are tokenized or excluded altogether. Another study examining civic curriculum in the U.S. gave the message that women do not belong in public spaces and positions of leadership (Avery & Simmons, 2001; Verba et al., 2006).
Foster (1996) found similar patterns in Australia, arguing that although schools promised equality in policy, they gave distinctly different messages to girls and boys. Girls were given the messages that they were expected to be good caregivers and caretakers, while boys were told it was expected that “boys will be boys” and were expected to compete and become leaders. Thus, public schooling reflects ando-centric, White and hetero-normative values, beliefs and practices that perpetuate inequality for girls (AAUW, 1992; Bach, 1998, p. 7; Gaskell et al., 1989; Sadker & Sadker, 1980, 1994).

For many girls, schooling is a subtractive process, where girls learn to repress, hide, deny parts of their identity, and privilege others. In this way, Gewinner (2002) argues that schooling forces girls to construct their identity within a matrix of domination and are socialized in ways that undermine their self-esteem, encouraging them to defer to existing hierarchies (Okin-Miller, 1999). Notwithstanding this hierarchy, females are taught to accept dominant values about gender and not critique or resist them. Thus, they learn that life as a series of individual choices where everyone has the equal opportunity to succeed in society (Jubas, 2006; Okin-Miller, 1999). Thus, without the discussion of women’s historical and current gender barriers and strategies, this process leads girls to internalize this view of gender and blame themselves for being unable to rise above the challenges in education and life. While many of these studies were conducted in the United States, Canadian scholars have documented similar patterns in Canadian schooling (Bashevkin, 2009; Bickmore, 1997, Gaskell et al, 1989).

In her 1998 thesis, Bach goes beyond an examination of the official, executed and hidden curriculum to describe what she terms the “evaded curriculum”, namely the set of issues, themes and needs of a variety of girls and young women that are avoided, repressed or ignored in schools. She described how schools avoid and exclude meaningful teaching and learning of emotion, bodies, sexuality and relations of power, which many young women want and need to tackle in schools, leaving them more vulnerable. Bach argues that in effect, schools are abdicating their responsibilities to prepare young people for their present and future lives as citizens (Bach, 1997). Bickmore (1997, p. 80) also suggests that by not providing girls the spaces in schools to develop skills related to deliberating and managing
conflict, it further exacerbates gendered messages young people get about appropriately feminine and masculine behavior.

Although it is now well documented that gender disparity is reproduced through public schooling in Canada, many academics have argued against the determinism of reproduction theories, arguing that individuals have choice and agency and are not just “purely reproduced” (Gaskell, 2004). Scholars must document both the forces that govern and shape girls and women’s lives, as well as the ways that they resist, defy and adapt to these expectations.

Weiler further argues for the need to document the stories and experiences of women and girls to provide more complex and accurate representations of how gender shapes the lives of women and is also shaped by women (Weiler, 1988). When examining citizenship in education, post-colonial scholars warn of the danger of generalizing about all males and females and ignoring the relationship between gender, race, ethnicity and other factors (Dillabough, 2003). They point out the diversity within women and the dynamic nature of identity – even that of one individual woman over the course of her lifetime (Weiler, 1988). It is important to recognize that each culture is not a monolithic block, but rather that there is considerable diversity within each group, with points of resistance and difference. Perhaps in response to the universalized womanhood, a group of scholars began to explore difference and diversity within the imagined category of “female”. They began to explore not only differences between men and women, but within the category of female, recognizing girls as distinct from adult women as well as the fact that their experiences of being female are situated within a discursive framework of intersecting discourses about race, class, sexuality and location. It is to the emerging field of girlhood studies that I will turn to next.

**Canadian Context:**

**Rhetoric and Reality, Diversity and Difference**

**Early History**

Canada is a nation formed out of a history of Aboriginal peoples, colonialism and immigration, making it from its very beginnings, a diverse country. The creation of the
Canadian national identity and citizenship concept has always had to balance a panoply of challenges including: at least two official colonial languages, two “founding” nations, several First Nations groups and languages, followed by several waves of immigrants from Europe and around the globe. As with many Colonial nations, our landmass was perceived by many of the nation’s founders, despite many existing Aboriginal communities, as a kind of blank slate, especially when compared to their southern neighbors who were fighting a revolution. The portrayal of early Canadian history in current educational curricula remains largely problematic (Joshee et al., 2012). Women have been mostly excluded from Canada’s early history and the relations between the British and the First Nations peoples are still referred to within official Ontario curricula as “European – Aboriginal Interactions” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 13). Early policymakers originally viewed education as a way to “civilize” the non-White population and instill them with Anglo, Christian values and a respect for property and deference to authority, giving birth to the invention of Residential schools. Schooling was seen as an effective way of training First Nations peoples, forcing them to leave behind their cultures and beliefs, so they could become “modern” and better themselves through “White” education (Carl, 2004). Thus, our notion of citizenship education is and has always been inextricably connected with concepts of diversity and difference, be they racial, cultural, linguistic or regional. In addition, since the British North America Act in 1867, education in Canada has been a provincial jurisdiction, presenting challenges to the teaching and learning of national identity and citizenship in the Canadian context.

Women were also excluded from political structures and public life, yet were also viewed as being born with natural abilities to “civilize” and care for the nation (Prentice, 1988). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, women’s activism centered on trying to expand their role in public life, ringing in what is now referred to as the First Wave of Canadian Feminism. Women’s early civic action was connected to enlarging woman’s place in society, increasing their access to education, and fighting for women’s recognition as citizens in their own right. Much of this early activism of women in Canada emerged from religious-based groups concerned with the moral character of society, including the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (Newman and White, 2006), The Hebrew Ladies Sewing Circle, and The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) that offered services and educational
programs directed at single working class women (Prentice, 1988). Black women recognized that their perspectives and needs were not being included in this early activism and created their own organizations to address the interconnected issues of race, class and gender discrimination. They founded the Women’s Home Missionary Society of the Baptist Church and the Coloured Women’s Club in Montreal (Brand, 1991). In addition, many women from First Nations communities did not identify with ideas of First Wave Feminism, concentrating their activism more on issues of colonialism and rejecting notions of a universal sisterhood (St. Denis, 2007).

As large numbers of new citizens entered Canada in the mid 19th century, Canadian schools were supposed to assimilate them so that they could “identify with Canada’s British Heritage” (Carl, 2004, p. 43). Until the Second World War, Canadian citizenship policy was designed to keep out immigrants, in particular non-White immigrants, and to assimilate all who did not fit the desired “norm” (Troper, 2002). In addition, originally, the “aim of public schools in Canada was to create a homogenous nation built on a common English language, a common culture, a common identification with the British Empire and an acceptance of British institutions and practices (Bruno-Jofre, 2002, p. 113). Women were not considered citizens in their own right until the “Famous Five” petitioned the Canadian Supreme Court in 1928 to ensure women’s citizenship status in the Constitution as well as the right to become representatives of the government and join the Senate. The battle was not easily won, however, and the Court denied their application. Only after appealing to the British Privy Council were the Canadian suffragettes able to successfully acquire citizenship status and recognition as “persons” under Canadian law (Library & Archives Canada, 2008).

These goals may seem far behind us now. The Second World War also brought significant changes to Canadian society, for many groups. The Federal government actively encouraged women to take up paid work outside the home to contribute to the war effort. Many of these jobs were in areas that were not traditionally associated with women, including munitions factories, signaling what is now commonly described as the Second Wave of Canadian feminism (Prentice, 1988). In 1951, the Ontario government passed the Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act, and by the end of the 1950s, almost all provinces had passed similar legislation. In 1956, it also passed legislation providing pay equity for
women working in the federal civil service (Newman & White, 2006). The Citizenship Act of 1947 signaled a move towards a more open and tolerant approach to diversity and multiculturalism, as Kymlicka (2003, p. 374, in Hughes & Sears, 2008) argues began to enshrine, “legislate and constitutionalize practices of accommodation”.

As in many countries, the 1970s and 1980s rang in a number of mass social movements, demanding greater rights, representation and social equality for minoritized groups, including the gay rights movement, the Civil Rights Movement and the women’s movements. In 1971, over 200 lesbian and gay activists protested on Parliament Hill to demand an end to the criminalization of homosexuality and increased protection under the Constitution (CBC Digital Archives, 2012). Many of the issues and challenges faced by women, racialized minorities and new immigrants came together when the Canadian Federal Government signed the Canadian Charter of Human Rights in 1982 (Status of Women: 1914-1945, 2008). While there was much public debate, this important step enshrined in the Canadian Constitution the equality of men and women, the ideals of multiculturalism, special protection for people with disabilities, in effect providing special recognition for group rights beyond an individual relationship with the state.

Recent History

Over the past several decades, a growing preoccupation with citizenship and diversity has gripped the democratic world. Canada is no different. Canadian identity, and indeed its ideals and practices of citizenship have been increasingly contested by many groups and social movements within the country, forcing a national dialogue about equity and diversity within Canadian society. The 1960s, 70s and 80s saw many significant accomplishments for the feminist movements, both in terms of policies and programs as well as changing social values about gender. A third wave of feminism emerged in the 1990s, raising concerns about the incredible diversity of women’s needs and highlighting intersections and connections of feminism with critical race, anti-colonial, anti-homophobia and anti-capitalism theories (Pinterics, 2001). In addition, Canada was one of the first countries to legalize same-sex marriage and recognize the unique rights of gay and lesbian Canadians. At the same time,
many cultural groups and immigrant communities with Canada lobbied for greater inclusion and against systemic discrimination.

While there has been a long-term trend towards greater inclusion and equity for all citizens regardless of backgrounds, many argue that historically low voter turnout rates in the past several elections signify a national dilemma that threatens the very survival of Canada (Griffiths, 2009). Cook and Westheimer (2006, p. 349) call it a ‘democratic deficit”, while Griffiths (2009) has characterized it as a crisis of civic apathy. Some have highlighted the low participation of women in formal politics in Canada (Bashevkin, 2009), and others have focused on young people’s lack of civic knowledge, provoking such books as What Culture? What Heritage (Hodgetts, 1968) and more recently, Who Killed Canadian History? (Granatstein, 1998). As Hughes and Sears (2009) chronicle, a series of publications have emerged, lamenting different forms of youth civic disengagement, from low voter turnout, low civic knowledge, or a “lack of commitment to democratic values” (p. 126). In 2001, a report was released entitled: Is Canadian Democracy in Crisis? (CRIC, 2001).

Joshee (1998, 2006) and others have argued that there has also been a significant shift in thinking away from an emphasis on diversity as a strength of Canada to seeing it as a problem which needs to be overcome (Joshee & Sinfield, p. 55). Joshee has documented a significant shift over the past few decades from an “assimilation” approach, towards multiculturalism, and more recently “social cohesion” (Joshee, 2004, p. 146). In March, 2009, Canada’s immigration Minister, Jason Kenney echoed a similar concern about growing diversity in a speech entitled: “Good Citizenship: The Duty to Integrate”. He noted that Canada’s longstanding embrace of diversity must be accompanied by a more deliberate “focus on the political values that are grounded in our history, the values of liberal democracy rooted in British Parliamentary democracy that precisely have given us the space to accommodate such diversity” (Kenney, 2010). In this statement, we can see Kenney’s reinforcement of the discourse that Canada has a long history of egalitarian values and structures of citizenship that can be attributed to its British Heritage and not to the activism and struggles of many social movements within the country.
Despite this rhetoric and public debate about a civic crisis and a decline of citizen participation, Hughes and Sears (2010), suggest that in reality, little has been done to develop, invest in and implement a comprehensive program for citizenship education, calling Canada merely a “dabbler” (Sears & Hughes, 2010, p. 1). Though it has no national program for citizenship education, Canada, and in particular Ontario, holds preparation for citizenship as one of the key functions of public education. Indeed, schools, educators, policymakers and interest groups display growing interest in developing strategies, models and materials designed to get young people to adopt knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become desirable citizens.

Citizenship often is conceptualized in terms of both rights granted to the citizen and responsibilities of the citizen to the state. In the modern Canadian context, it is very much tied to notions of responsibility to the state, and is focused less on rights, often referred to as the “civic republican” ideal of citizenship (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Barber, 1992; Sears & Hughes, 2008). Undoubtedly, as Hebert (2009) suggests, “responsibility is at the very heart of citizenship” (Hebert, 2009, p. 5; Kymlicka & Norman, 2000, Young, 2000). While definitions may remain in flux and highly disputed, within Canada there is broad agreement among many scholars that schools should be models of democracy so students can learn to participate in a democratic society and learn appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to become active citizens (Davies, 2005; Hahn, 1998; Schwille & Amadeo, 2002).

Moreover, many agree that it should prepare young people for a wide range of participation, representing in McLaughlin’s (2000, p. 55) terms, “maximal” rather than “minimal” participation (McLaughlin, 1992). Other more recent models developed to theorize different levels of citizen engagement emerged, including Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) now oft-cited model of the “Personally-responsible”, “Participatory” and “Social Justice-Oriented” Citizen (Westheimer & Kahne, 2008, p. 9). The personally-responsible citizen, similar to the notion of a minimal citizenship, may vote, recycle and take care of their own property. The participatory citizen may get involved in community organizations or volunteer at a school. The more maximal citizen, or social-justice oriented citizen may have more radical or transformative view of citizenship that incorporates an understanding of systemic inequality and the need to address it through advocacy work or other forms of civic activism.
While these various models provide very useful concepts to examine citizen engagement and examine the ways that schools prepare students for participation in society, they do not address the fundamental critiques of feminists and the continued gendered nature of society. These models do not consider the relationship between the private and the public spheres of society and address the central criticism of Pateman (1988) and other scholars have raised for decades.

Sears and Hughes (2008) suggest that in fact this growing international consensus about citizenship education is also mirrored by a belief in constructivist approaches to teaching and learning as best practices in citizenship education. In Ontario, the Grade 10 Civics course is focused on preparing “Informed, Purposeful and Active” citizens (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002). How are these theories and ideas being taken up in classrooms? Do these models adequately represent how diversity and difference (in particular gender, culture and race) affect an individual’s citizen participation? If young people are taught to become active, perhaps “maximal” or “social justice-oriented” citizens in school, is it enough to overcome systemic inequalities and structural barriers?

There are now well-documented critiques of a unitary narrative of multiculturalism and a Canadian national identity conveyed in Canadian school curricula. Despite the growing number of immigrants and ethnic minorities that make up the Canadian population, the dominant vision of the national identity is still largely White, male, and Christian (Bickmore, 2006; Handa, 2003; Joshee, 2006, Jubas, 2006; Lee & Hebert, 2006). There are now well-documented critiques of a unitary narrative the Canadian National identity (Handa, 2003, p. 70). Despite the growing number of immigrants and ethnic minorities that make up the Canadian population, the dominant vision of the national identity as portrayed in Canadian education is still largely White, male, Christian, educated (Joshee & Johnson, 2007, p. 38). This concept of identity is then reproduced in Canadian schools, curriculum and the media, problematizing the immigrant and minority populations and identities (Joshee & Johnson, 2007, p. 42). In this way, girls and minorities are sent the message that “you can be different, but not too different” (Hernandez, 1997, p. 70).
Recent large-scale, cross-country studies have found that though civic education is ubiquitous, it is generally low-status and elusive. In fact, in many countries, deliberate civic education curricula is limited and sporadic, and sometimes only appears in the late years of high school. Sears, Clarke, and Hughes (1999) found that in Canada there is a lack of awareness about how the knowledge, skills and practices of citizenship are learned, how they are taught, and how to monitor progress (Schwille & Amadeo, 2002; Sears, Clarke, & Hughes, 1999). As James Banks (1997) argued in the American context:

Citizenship education has been constructed historically by powerful and mainstream groups served by their interests and it has often fostered citizen passivity rather than action, taught students large doses of historical myths in its attempt to develop patriotism, conceptualize citizenship responsibility primarily as voting, and reinforced the dominant social, racial and class inequalities in American society. (p. 4)

Despite a growing interest in citizenship education in Canada, several scholars argue that current practice has changed little over the past few decades. Recent research concluded that it focuses almost exclusively on political and military events, avoids controversy, and constructs citizenship in more elitist and passive terms than in other democracies (Schwille & Amadeo, 2002). Although there is a mandatory Grade 10 Civics course in Ontario’s schools, studies reveal that it is often implemented using passive, traditional, teacher-centered methods (Hughes, 1996; Osborne, 1997; Sears, Clarke, & Torney-Purta et al., 1999). In addition, it is often paired with a course on Careers and because it is not connected with testing, it ends up being implemented in imperfect ways. Indeed, many academics have criticized Canada’s existing civic education as brainwashing at worst (Sears & Hughes, 1996, 2006), and unreflective of the changing nature of societies at best (Sears & Hughes, 1996). More recently, Sears and Hughes (2006) contend that the “research base for citizenship is at best fragmented and sporadic” (Sears & Hughes, 2006, p 8). Further, in comparison with the UK and other countries, Canada has not built a substantial research capacity in the area of citizenship education. While there may be a growing attention to promoting youth engagement in the Canadian context, as Sears and Hughes suggest, it is mostly focused narrowly on youth voter turnout and instead needs to use a broader definition of engagement.
Interestingly, as the official policy of multiculturalism got translated into policy in schools and curricula, the language of diversity has shifted away from concerns about gender and class and begun to frame concerns about gender in “colonial eyes” (Crocco, as cited in Subedi, 2009, p. 20). Further, some have illustrated how a growing emphasis on issues of ethnocultural diversity in education has actually been at the expense of a more holistic approach, failing to examine continued issues of gender, sexuality, and constructions of femininity and masculinity (Boyle-Baise in Riviere, 2005). Merryfield and Subedi, among many scholars argue that we need a more complex and multifaceted portrayal of women and avoid generalizing about all women regardless of their multiple identities and positionalities (Merryfield & Subedi, 2001).

Project Citizen-Girl study was located in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the largest city in Canada with a population of almost 6 million people. Statistics Canada estimates that by 2017, 1 in 5 Canadians will belong to a visible minority group and 95% will be living in urban areas, like Toronto (Statistics Canada, 2005). From an originally largely First Nations and British province, Ontario has rapidly become one of the most culturally diverse provinces in the world. The GTA consists of the City of Toronto and the surrounding municipalities of Durham, Halton, Peel and York. The Toronto District School Board is the largest and most diverse board in the country, with 170 and 100 languages represented (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003, p. 3). During the 1990s, the conservative Harris government instituted many significant changes to education in Ontario. These changes included administrative centralization, the introduction of standardized testing in Grades 3 and 6, and policy reform. The new curriculum shifted focus away from explicit attention to diversity and citizenship to a narrower focus on literacy, numeracy and workplace preparation.

Between 2004-2012, the government of Ontario made efforts to restore public confidence in education, build better relationships with teachers and restore funding to education, while maintaining accountability and standards. In 2004, a revised Social Studies curriculum was released for Grades 1-6 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Curriculum review processes in Ontario are generally quite collaborative and involve extensive consultations with many stakeholders, including educators, subject specialists, teachers, parents, Faculties of Education, and students. Enhancing parental engagement in public
schooling is a significant priority for the Ministry. Recent analyses of Ontario curriculum have found a foregrounding of neo-liberal and neo-conservative policy discourses, over more social justice curricula (Joshee, 2004; Joshee & Johnson, 2007; Joshee, Pashby & Ingram, 2012; Thompson, 2004; Osbourne, 2001; Sears & Wright, 2004). The concepts of citizenship education can be found in many of the curriculum expectations throughout the Ontario public school curricula and there are numerous opportunities for teachers to take up issues of citizenship, equality, rights and responsibilities, identity and belonging. However, the representation of women and the spaces for critically engaging with ideas about gender are limited to the margins of the curricula.

In the current Ministry of Education’s website section “What we do”, they lay out their main goals for all public schooling in the province of Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). This statement focuses largely on: (a) increasing student achievement (as defined by literacy and numeracy), (b) reducing gaps in student achievement and (c) increasing public confidence in public schooling. Nowhere in this statement of goals does it explicitly mention the connection between school and society in general, citizenship or gender equity. There is only a small implicit reference to the concept of school and society in the statements about the need for “character development”, peaceful schools and students’ community involvement. Many of the Ontario curricula have been revised since 2005 and at the time of writing this thesis, the Social Science, Language and Native Studies curricula at the Primary and Secondary levels are being reviewed. In 2010, several Ontario course curricula are undergoing review, including the following courses: Grade 10 Civics, and Grade 12 Canada and World Studies (Ministry of Education, 2010). It remains to be seen, however, what changes will be made and how they will reflect more attention to equity, diversity (including gender) and democratic citizenship. It is important to point out that though these curricula may invite equal participation of all citizens, by ignoring difference and the significance of identity and location does not make all citizens equal, but rather silences systemic inequalities and structural barriers based on gender, race, class and culture (Hernandez, 1998, p. 19).

In the Social Studies, History and Geography Curriculum revised in 2004, there are six key concepts that link up with some of the central themes of global citizenship education,
including: Systems and structures; Interactions and Interdependence; Environment, Change and Continuity; Power and Governance. In addition, the curriculum states as a central goal to help students “acquire the habits of mind” necessary in a pluralistic democracy characterized by rapid political, social and technological changes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004b). Though there are a web of policy statements, courses and curricula in the TDSB and in Ontario more broadly, studies have shown that there is a “conspicuous absence” of support and implementation for provincial Human Rights Codes in GTA schools (Riviere, 2005). It is indeed important to examine the Ontario curricula and its representation of gender, diversity and democratic citizenship in order to better understand the context in which the participants in my study are being schooled. It is important to state however that curriculum is not the main focus of this dissertation and will remain more of a backdrop to the research, which is focused on girls’ perspectives of schooling.

**Researcher Location**

Like many people in the world today, my own identity is complex and depends on who I’m talking to and in what context. I was born in The Ivory Coast to Canadian parents, and grew up in several countries speaking both English and French. Though my hybridity is a product of my privileged position as a middle class, White, educated, First-world woman, my international childhood also gave me an understanding of how millions of people live around the world and helped me develop a deep commitment to working for equity and social justice.

My grandmothers immigrated to Canada from Europe and navigated multiple, complex, cultural, economic and social associations. Nanny Gina, who died more than ten years ago, was a major influence on my life. A warm and funny woman, she was married off to a Russian man to escape the Holocaust in Poland and ended up in a British refugee camp in the then-colony of India. I think of her as being like many people today, positioned as object, victim, outsider, refugee, and escapee. She was an intellectually curious and vibrant woman, a voracious reader and a world traveller, Nanny Gina was indeed a role model. Despite having survived the Holocaust, having lost all of her family in concentration camps
and a sister to suicide, she remained for most of her life someone who relished the life she was granted and enjoyed travel, food, literature and the arts.

My maternal grandmother, Ruth, grew up in rural Sweden and was left with relatives by her mother who moved to Canada to find her husband. Eventually, she came across to Canada on a boat when she was 8 yrs old and spoke often of this experience and the impact it had on her. Ruth was another self-educated woman who despite obvious intellect, innate capacity and interest in further education, accepted what she viewed as her roles as a female and never went on to university. She did work outside the home her entire life and was a strong advocate for social justice and greater equality in society for all citizens. As an employee of a government agency, Nanny Ruth helped new immigrants to Northern Ontario to find housing and work and settle in Canada.

In the end, neither of my grandmothers received a post-secondary education or were able to develop their capacities in an academic setting. Despite not completing a formal degree program, they both continued to participate in nonformal and informal education in a variety of ways. In addition, despite their significant contributions to our family, their communities and their society, these contributions were often unacknowledged in the broader context. It was in large part because of my close connection to my grandmothers and my recognition of their lives that I embarked on a doctoral program.

Growing up, I knew that there were different expectations of my brother and our roles in the world. I always felt I was getting mixed messages about family and societal expectations of me. I was expected to do well in school, to be polite and have strong values, but not to “rock the boat”. At the same time, both of my parents sought out my opinion on real life issues and discussion around the dinner table has always been an active and vibrant unpacking of the news of the day. My parents have always encouraged me to be ambitious and aim high. Though we had two professional parents when we were young, it was obvious to me that my father’s career took precedence over my mother’s. Every time we moved to another part of the world because of my father’s work, my mother had to creatively renegotiate her professional life in a new place, from Washington D.C. to Lagos, Nigeria.
Over the years, my mother acted as chief advisor, editor, writer and manager to my father, contributing to his speeches, his professional choices as well as having her own successful career in international development and taking care of many of the household responsibilities. In addition, my father gave public speeches, keynote addresses and published articles, reports and editorials in his own name, all with my mother’s advice. This is, what Carol Pateman (1988) might call the Patriarchal Dividend: the relationship that underpins much of the modern nation-state, where men’s public success is built on the private, work of women that is viewed as irrelevant to ideas of nationhood or citizenship.

At the same time, having the privilege of being able to travel and see how other people live helped me realize not only the infinite diversity that exists within human society, but also the gross inequality and injustice as well. Thus, my family also helped to instill in me a desire to work to address these injustices and make life more liveable for those who were less fortunate. Though noone in my family was involved in formal politics or organized social movements, we grew up with an understanding that we were expected to educate ourselves, through both formal and informal learning, and be actively engaged with public and global affairs. Countless dinner conversations, phone calls and email exchanges continue to crackle with discussions, debates and analysis about all manner of civic and political affairs.

Attending a prestigious all girls’ school during high school seemed to reflect these contradictory messages that many of the girls revealed in this study. On one hand, we were expected to be high achieving, successful leaders in our communities, on the other hand, we were also supposed to wear sweater sets, be feminine and not challenge the existing gender relations. Though we were surrounded with strong female role models, we still learned very little about women’s roles in history and very seldom had opportunities to critically engage with ideas of gender, identity and the places of women in society. Though I attended a academically demanding all girls’ high school, it wasn’t really until I took my first gender studies course in my undergraduate studies that I was able to articulate the gaps, omissions and mixed messages that I was receiving growing up. I remember the professor talking about foundational philosophies of American and western political and civic life, including self-reliance, individualism, equality and human rights. “Picture it”, she said, “picture the great
American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson sitting alone writing about the importance of self-reliance and individualism while an army of unseen women cooked his food, cleaned his house and generally ran his private life without recognition of their contributions”.

This image struck me as somewhat similar to the arrangement in my own family, my father credited with great career success, while I knew my mother managed most of the housework and child-care. It wasn’t until this gender studies course that I realized that, despite my supportive family, my privilege and my education at an all-female school, there were significant gaps, omissions and mixed messages in how I learned my roles in society, as a middle class White female and as a citizen of Canada. At the same time, living in many different countries, I became more aware of how privileged I was in many ways because of my Whiteness, my economic status, and my position as a North American.

No doubt, there has been significant progress made by and for women since my grandmothers were young. However, despite these advances, there are still many personal and structural challenges affecting women’s engagement in civic and public life. My situation is not unlike many young women in Canada today. Like other women, I continue to struggle with the contradictory messages girls and women get: that they can achieve anything they want in society, while also being taught to accept different roles in society than my male counterparts.

Over the past 15 years, I have worked as a teacher, teacher-educator, program manager of programs with/for girls and young women. As an English teacher in Japan, I saw the girls in my classes sit silently through class, only to descend on my desk after class in a flurry of questions and conversations. As a program manager for girls’ programs in Canada, I noticed the contradiction between how the girls were encouraged to set high goals for themselves, work collaboratively and take on leadership roles. At the same time, however, there was a lack of critical engagement with ideas of femininity and gender, race, class and sexuality and how the structures of society constructed women. Through these professional experiences, I have seen the complexities that young women face as they seek to navigate the mixed messages they receive about being a female citizen. In my study, I wanted to examine what young women have to say about the way that we prepare students for democratic
participation in Canada, why the voices of girls and women are often excluded, and how we can change the way citizenship is taught in schools to better reflect the experiences of a diverse group of girls.

**Overview, Goals and Significance of Study:**

“Project Citizen-Girl”

This study is a qualitative, arts-informed investigation of girls’ perspectives on gender, identity, citizenship and schooling. It consists of semistructured interviews, document analysis and a collaborative, critical and creative inquiry process (Gallagher, 2008) using photovoice with a group of seven young women from the Toronto area, all of whom were active citizens and members of Plan Canada’s Girls Speakers Bureau. The girls took photographs on general themes and wrote descriptions and explanations of why they selected the images and then analyzed and discussed them as a group, selecting main themes out of each discussion. Subsequently, I analyzed all of their discussions, the individual interviews and the process in its entirety.

To date, there has been limited empirical work examining girls’ perspectives and experiences of citizenship, activism and civic engagement (Evans, 2005, Plyer, 2005; Taft, 2011; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). While there have been many large scale studies that examine gendered patterns of participation or conceptualizations of citizenship, (Hahn, 1998; Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999), it is difficult with such methodologies to explore girls’ perspectives in depth and complexity possible with an approach like photovoice. The purpose of this study is to explore in depth the perspectives and experiences of a diverse group of young women who are “civically active’, who had a strong interest in girls’ rights and gender equality and who were participating with a program that not only focused on gender and civic engagement, but also worked locally as well as globally. I wanted to understand the challenges and opportunities they have in their own lives and see concepts of citizenship and gender through their eyes and learn what their experiences could teach us about the messages that they get about their roles as girl-citizens, from their families, schools and communities. I also sought to better understand how girls who were actively involved in a program advocating gender equality and girls’ rights conceptualized citizenship and gender and how
they navigated concepts of femininity in their lives. Though I explore similarities between the girls’ lives, I will also examine intra-group diversity as well as the multiple layers, overlaps, intersections of their various identities. In addition, recognizing the importance of making explicit my role in this process and will interweave my reflections throughout the thesis.

By including the voices of a diverse group of young women, this study will add to the literature on girlhood studies, and education for citizenship, two areas that are increasingly of interest around the world. At a time when the role of education for citizenship and democracy is gaining significance around the globe, and the concept of “citizen” is being hotly contested and reinvented, it is important to understand how it relates to and responds to the complexity of human identity and historical limitations and inequalities. In particular, since girls have been missing, marginalized and silenced in much of the teaching and learning of citizenship in schools, looking at concepts of citizenship, participation and gender from their perspectives is crucial to better understand how educators and policymakers can better meet their needs. Furthermore, by adding to the knowledge in the area of civic education, this study will help educators and relevant public organizations to meet their objectives of delivering equal opportunities to all citizens to engage in civic and political life.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This thesis is organized into 8 chapters.

Chapter One: This introductory chapter will provide an overview of the study, its goals and the organization of the thesis. In addition, it will include some personal reflections on my own location in relationship to this study and will weave in researcher reflections throughout this thesis, in line with feminist theorizing about the importance of situating myself in my research.

Chapter Two: In this chapter I will present the literature review and conceptual framework for the study. It brings together a number of bodies of literature from the emerging field of girlhood studies, education for citizenship and democracy, and feminist, post-colonial and anti-racist education. It identifies gaps and problems in these bodies of
thought that frame our understanding of girls and their ideas about and enactment of citizenship. In addition, the literature review will draw on feminist, anti-racist and post-colonial scholars to critique and problematize some of the dominant theories of education for citizenship. Finally, I present a conceptual framework that brings together some of the literature on girlhood and identity with models about education for citizenship to examine the data presented in later chapters.

Chapter Three: This chapter presents the research design, demonstrating the need to use a combination of collaborative, critical and creative methods in order to best understand the perspectives and lives of young women. I explain my rationale for choosing interviews, document analysis and photovoice, describe my setting and research participants (participant-researchers), and detail my analysis process. In addition, I provide some reflections on the use of photovoice as methodology, considering both positive aspects and challenges.

Chapter Four: This chapter will present a series of brief narrative profiles of the participants, their ideas about gender in their families, schools and society at large. These profiles are designed to shed light on the kinds of messages these girls are receiving about what is expected of them as girls and as citizens, as well as providing some insight into what motivated them to become active citizens and gender activists.

Chapter Five: In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the girls’ group analysis process related to identity and gender. In addition, I include many of the images they presented and discussed, as well as the key themes the group identified in their discussions.

Chapter Six: Similar to chapter five, I will provide the girls’ group discussion and analysis related to citizenship and schooling and share several of their images as well.

Chapter Seven: This chapter provides a second layer to the discussion, providing my analysis of the various sources of data, including photographs, interviews, documents as well as of the girls’ analysis itself.

Chapter Eight: This chapter provides final reflections and discussion from the project. In addition, the conclusion will also discuss implications of this study for future research, grounded in the girls’ perspectives and recommendations. Further, chapter eight also includes
recommendations from the participants for teachers, educators and policymakers about ways to better support girls (and boys) in developing a critical awareness of gender and the implications for girls’ active participation in society. Finally, I close the thesis with my own reflections as this Ph.D. journey comes to a close, while new chapters are yet to begin.
Chapter 2
Literature Review:
Situating “Citizen-Girls”

Introduction:
Where Do Girls Fit In?

Girls, Education, and Citizenship

The relationship of girls to education for citizenship is complex and fraught with contradictions. On one hand, schooling is a powerful tool for girls to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for self-determination, socioeconomic mobility, career success, and greater access to civic and political spaces. On the other hand, it continues to marginalize the contributions of women -- in particular women of color -- ignore the divisions between the public and private spheres of life, and treat women’s contributions within the home as irrelevant to our understanding of civic and political life. Liberal discourses of citizenship that dominate Canadian ideas of citizenship in schooling depoliticize the private sphere and ignore the variety of girls’ and women’s’ activities, activism and participation that do not fall within narrow definitions of civic participation (Desai, 2002; Durish, 2002; Jelin, 1990; Miraftab, 2004).

In this context, girls are viewed as having little relevance to the debates about citizenship and democratic participation. In public debate and policy-formulation the voices of girls and young women are few. Their issues, desires, perspectives on and experiences of citizenship and citizenship learning are largely absent from literature on girlhood, youth civic engagement, social movements and citizenship (Taft, 2011). Their perspectives are underrepresented in research and policy-making in Canada and their contributions to society have been treated as minimal to world history (Handa, 2005; Savoie, 2005; Subedi & Crocco, 2010). The relationship between female consciousness and a man’s world is complex and involves both accommodation and resistance, self and externally-imposed silences (Weiler, 1988). There has been few recent studies to give voice to the experiences of girls that illustrate the challenging relationship that females have to education and citizenship.
I drew from a variety of literature in order to fully understand and theorize the citizenship perspectives and experiences of these girls. In this chapter, I review the critiques of feminist and post-colonial scholars along with those working in the area of education for democratic citizenship. In addition, I will examine the newly emergent field of girlhood studies, which most directly examines the lives, perspectives and experiences of girls, paying particular attention to the multiple layers of discourses that shape girls’ identity-construction and participation in families, schools and society. Furthermore, I will weave together the different bodies of literature, and examine connections, overlaps and contradictions between them. Finally, I will draw on critical theories examining gender, cultural background and identity to critique the dominant theories about education for citizenship. These analyses demonstrate that despite the pervasive belief among many scholars --and indeed citizens-- that education leads to active and full participation for all citizens, many systemic challenges exist.

**Citizenship and Civic Participation:**

**Contested and Complex**

From its very inception, the nation-state has always had a problematic relationship with women and girls (Kaplan et al., 1994, p. 1). The western notion of citizenship was based on the relationship between the state and an individual citizen, paying little attention to his or her social location (Gordon et al., 2000). As Luce Irigaray describes, “the nation-state sharpens the defining lines of citizenship for women, racialized ethnicities and sexualities in the construction of a socially stratified society” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 171). Thus, it poses an inherent contradiction for many citizens: on the surface it promises inclusion, equality, social mobility and expanded citizenship roles and spaces to all citizens, while simultaneously reproducing the very structures that guarantee the continuation of hierarchies and systemic inequality (Kaplan et al., 1994). Connell (1987) argues that the nation-state is the central site for the production of White, “hegemonic masculinity” (in Kaplan et al., 1994, p. 1). The idea of citizenship attached to a nationalist project conjures up an imaginary border between those who “belong” and those who do not, between those who are granted access to the privileges and rights of citizenship and those who are not. Bull (1994) has described this concept as a “Janus-faced” state, which by its very nature, is two-faced and contradictory.
Indeed, there have been decades, if not centuries, of feminist, post-colonial and anti-racist critiques of dominant political theories and civic and political structures within the Western context. Mary Wollstonecraft (1999) wrote her feminist tome *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, critiquing women’s exclusion from civic and political life. In addition, scholars were critiquing citizenship from a critical race perspective. Early Black intellectuals in the U.S., such as Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglas, critiqued civic and political life using critical race theories as far back as the mid nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Routledge Social Theory Rewired, 2012). While there has been great progress in addressing gender and racial inequality over the past several decades, many would argue that there is a growing literature that documents the gendered and raced nature of citizenship and citizenship learning (Arnot & Dillabough, 2000; Benhabib, 1992; Bernard-Powers, 2008; Foster, 1997; Leech, 1994; Lister, 1997; Marion-Young, 1987; Mirza, 2011, Pateman, 1988. 1989; Yuval-Davis, 1999). However, these critiques of citizenship have not significantly transformed mainstream theories of political or civic participation and the teaching and learning of citizenship.

At its core, much of the literature on citizenship in education is based on an ideal of an individual, “universal” citizen, without attention to identity or location. Promoting a notion of citizenship without recognizing the reality of systemic inequality is, in effect, reproducing the mechanisms that grant privilege to some, while simultaneously guaranteeing the exclusion of others. In addition, feminists and post-colonial scholars have argued that in much of the world, the idea of the “good citizen” and the officially sanctioned forms of civic engagement have been defined in the model of a White, western, privileged, heterosexual man (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Balibar, 1994). This universalist notion of citizenship, while supposedly promising equal access to all, effectively ignores how one’s multiple identities and association affect his or her ability to adopt and enact those theoretical rights and responsibilities of citizenship put forth by the government (Arnot & Dillabough, 2007; Banks, 2005; Lister, 1997). Feminists have argued that the modern nation-state and its civic and political structures, are founded on the divide between the public and the private, where the participation and success of male citizens in the public sphere are dependent on the unacknowledged contributions of women within the private sphere. This unequal relationship, argues Carol Pateman (1989), is called the “patriarchy dividend”. No doubt,
most women continue to bear the brunt of most responsibilities in the home, which in turn has consequences for their status in society and their participation within public life. As Foster (1996) argues, mainstream political theory and a revived interest in participatory democracy and education for citizenship, though positive, continues to ignore the long history of scholars who critique civic and political structures, having serious implications for legal status and the full participation of women as citizens (Foster, 1996).

Democratic theorists have not yet confronted the implications of the patriarchal construction of citizenship and so they provide little or not help in elucidating or solving the complex dilemma facing women…within the contemporary patriarchal order, and within the confines of the ostensibly universal categories of democratic theory: it is taken for granted that for women to be active, full citizens, they must become (like) men. (Pateman, 1989, p. 14)

This arrangement puts girls and young women in a difficult position, forced sometimes to choose between authentic self-expression and inclusion within patriarchal structures that value masculinity and maleness over femininity and female-ness.

Within colonial contexts, much like Canada, White women from the Global North were positioned as the hallmarks of respectability, modernity and civilization, and the identity of non-White women was constructed in “opposition” to this ideal, ignoring the heterogeneity within these categories as well as the overlapping of these identities (Handa, 2003). Women were constructed as the “reproducers of the nation, creating disconnect between citizenship and cultural group identity” as well (Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 13). Because women were viewed as the guardians of culture and nation at the same time, many racialized minority groups within the colonial state took increasingly stricter measures to regulate women’s bodies, clothing and movements to guard their positions within traditionally patriarchal structures, be they from the nation or their countries of origins. Many of these discourses continue in Canada today, constructing girls and gender in dichotomous ways and privileging some girls over others.

Thus, there lies an inherent tension in the relationship between girls to structures of citizenship and schooling that is difficult to expose and understand. In their book *Challenging Democracy*, Arnot and Dillabough (2000) suggest that “female citizens are
embedded in a set of tensions that illustrate the struggles women have waged in relation to the exclusive elements of liberal democratic citizenship” (Arnot & Dillabough, 2000, p. 2). These efforts are characterized by the fact that “women’s movements have always struggled with dilemmas of equality and difference: equality with males versus being different from them, preserving women’s separate sphere versus becoming full members of existing society by giving up women’s traditional spaces” (Benhabib, 1992, pp. 29--30). Despite changing values and significant progress in addressing racial and gender inequality in Canada, current notions of citizenship as constructed in Canadian schooling, ensures the continuation of systemic barriers to true equality and social transformation.

**Learning to Be a “Good Girl”**

**Current Debates About “Gendered Citizenship”**

In spite of great progress made towards greater equality within Canadian society, evidence suggests that girls and boys still get very different messages about their gender roles in society (Bickmore, 1997). Recognizing that gender is shaped by race, class, sexuality, culture and geography, is it still useful to examine the ways that men and women are socialized and the messages they are given about what is expected from them in their families, schools, communities and society. Despite the dominant perception in Canada that gender socialization is more a problem within minority communities than in society at large, evidence suggests otherwise. In particular, Suarez-Orozco, Qin, and Sirin and Fine (2008) found that regardless of racial, or cultural background, girls and boys are given different messages about what is expected of them. Males are still socialized to achieve, to be self-reliant, aggressive and independent, whereas females are socialized to be nurturing, responsible and obedient, as well as good supporters of the men in their lives (Bashevkin, 2009; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). In this way, the experiences of men and women are divided into binary categories and many of women’s contributions to society are considered apolitical and thus unrelated to public policy and formal education (Bashevkin, 2009; Hernandez, 1997; Lister, 1997; Llewllyn, 2006; Young, 1990). Moreover, the socialization of ideas about gender also serves to reinforce the notion that any different patterns of participation can be attributed to biological sex differences and not socially constructed notions of appropriate behavior and roles for men and women.
Another central argument of many feminists is how society’s value of economic productivity results in the privileging of paid work, public contributions and the undervaluing of unpaid work in the home (Jubas, 2006). Many feminists have argued that we must reconceptualize citizenship to include the unpaid work of women as citizenship activities (Lister, 1997; Noddings, 1994; Waring, 1998). As Julia Preece points out, what students learn about being a citizen stands in contrast to what they learn about being a “good girl” in society (Preece, 2002). Dominant concepts of the “citizen” in education continue to distinguish sharply between the public and private spheres of life, ignoring considerable contributions of girls and women in the private realm, as well as privileging the public over the private (Arnot & Dillabough, 2007; Foster, 2000; Lister 1997; Mohanty 1997). In addition, much teaching and learning about citizenship ignores how the time, energy and contributions of women in the private sphere – that is within the family, home and community- may affect their ability and interest in enacting citizenship learning participation in the public sphere. Foster (2000) argues that equality for women, as with other groups in society, will not be achieved simply by giving women access to citizenship rights defined on a male ideal. We cannot simply “add women and stir” in order to fully address the gendered nature of citizenship and political structures. As many would argue, simply adding more women to structures that are by definition raced, classed and gendered, denies contributions and activities of women that fall outside the formal political structures and de-politicizes the public-private divide.

Mainstream writing about citizenship and democracy pays little or no attention to the very gendered and raced nature of civic and political systems and theories. In contrast to a “master-narrative” and a technocratic, linear view of education, many education scholars believe in reconceptualizing our notions of identity and citizenship to better reflect the complex nature of subjectivity. As Iris Marion Young (1997) has argued, the ideal of citizenship does not match up with the reality of life, especially in pluralistic, multicultural societies. Furthermore, many have argued that identity is a fluid and dynamic concept and individuals have multiple identities and associations (Banks, 2004; Lister, 1997; Mohanty, 1997; Sankofa, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 1997). It is impossible to separate race, gender, sexuality and culture because they are interlocked and interrelated (Handa, 2003; Ponzanesi, 2007; Riviere, 2005). It is important, argues post-modern or post-structuralist feminist scholars, not
to over-generalize about the experience of all girls and women, or even all girls of a particular minority group. “Location and identity of individuals mediates their understanding of citizenship and determines their access to citizenship ideas and structures, as well as their capacity to exercise agency” (Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 5). As identity is socially constructed, it is possible that girls hold multiple, even contradictory identities all at once (Riviere, 2005). In considering the position of girls within discourses of citizenship, it is also essential to examine the intersections of race, class, gender that shape girls’ ideas and enactment of citizenship (Denis, 2008).

In addition, many studies have found that young people with seemingly fragmented or compound identities can function harmoniously and reflect a certain comfort level with complexity that is healthy for the individual, and for society as a whole (Banks, 2004; Osler & Starkey, 2003). The reality of an increasingly globalized world means that the experience of multiple loyalties is not exceptional, but increasingly common (Osler & Starkey, 2003, p. 243). In order for people to have strong loyalties to a particular nation or country or identity, they must feel a sense of acceptance and “belonging” which is both cultural and intensely personal and rests on their being treated fairly and wholly within society (Osler & Starkey, 2003, p. 252). Thus, concepts of citizenship in education must be adapted to reflect this increasing diversity, and policymakers must learn from the experiences of diverse young women to ensure that education is responding to their unique needs as distinct from those of males. Thus, as Arnot and Dillabough (2000) suggest, the question for feminist, critical scholars to ask is “how and in what ways and contexts does schooling shape the process of gender identification and citizenship in the broadest sense (p. 2). Recognizing the diversity of Canada’s young people, and the evidence of a deeply gendered civic and political environment, we need more investigation of how a student’s cultural and/or gender identity shapes his/her attitude towards -- and engagement in civic and political life.

While analyzing the girls’ conversations and images over the course of a year, it was difficult to examine the similarities and shared themes as “citizen-girls” while also representing them as complex, multifaceted individuals. In the group of participants in my study, it was crucial to me to both see the girls’ individual stories and unique experiences of gender and civic engagement recognizing the influence of race, class, or cultural background
along with tracing and teasing our some shared experiences. For example, Michelle talked about how when in Canada, she feels Jamaican, while in Jamaica with family, she identifies as Canadian. In addition, it became clear that they were post-modern and post-structuralist beings existing and learning how to fit within a modernist structure in the form of public schooling and society. Although schooling in Ontario has undergone significant transformation in the past few decades, and there are explicit policies and programs supporting greater equity and diversity based on gender, race and culture (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009c; TDSB, 2012;), more work needs to be done. Formal public schooling is still largely a modernist enterprise, where youth are being prepared to adopt desirable values, behaviours and perspectives that are desired by the nation-state, in this case, Ontario.

In this thesis, I will examine some shared themes of the group of girls, while also looking at their experiences of being girl-citizens through a lens of intersectionality, recognizing them as complex individuals situated in particular contexts and locations. While I recognize the complex relationship of gender, race, class, culture and nationality, in this thesis, I will foreground ideas of gender for two reasons. As Davies (in Pillow, 2002, p. 11) argues in her study on gender and preschool girls, gender is arguably the first identity category assigned to young people, even before they are born into this world. Moreover, gender has not been received sufficient attention in the mainstream literature on citizenship and democracy in education and continues to be relegated to the margins. In this way, this dissertation will attempt to address these gaps in the literature.

**Patterns in Civic Participation:**

**Diversity, Identity and Difference**

A myriad of forces, including economic crisis, growing income inequality and declining birth rates are driving greater migration and creating massive demographic shifts. In response to these massive global shifts, many countries in the world are witnessing a growing preoccupation about citizenship and how education links to citizen participation (Cook & Westheimer, 2006; Davies & Evans, 2002; Davies, 2006; Hebert & Sears, 2002, Hodgetts, 1968; Hughes and Sears, 2008; McLaughlin, 1999; Westheimer, 2008). While most ideas of citizenship promise universal access, what do we know about how difference
and social location relates to citizenship ideas and enactment? What can research tell us about patterns of civic and political participation?

There is a growing literature on citizenship in education (Hahn, 1998; Osborne, 2001; Sears, Clarke & Hughes 1999; Torney-Purta et al., 2001), as well as a long history of feminist theorizing about citizenship and the role of gender in education (Arnot & Dillabough, 2007; Benhabib, 1992, Kane, 1995; Kerry & Vincent, 2003; Hahn, 1996, 1998; Hahn et al., 2007; Leech, 1994; Lister 1997, 2000; Mirza, 2000; Mohanty, 1997; Osler, 2009; Preece 2003; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Weiler, 1998). Despite this scholarly attention, many of the central critiques in this area have not significantly changed the dominant citizenship discourses in education (Arnot & Dillabough, 2007; Bernard-Powers, 2008; Lister, 1997).

Finally, much of the work examining gender differences in education has been focused on the “underachievement” of boys, pushing girls off the research agenda, and avoiding a more critical examination of how masculinity and femininity are constructed, taught and learned by young people (Ringrose, 2007). In spite of the proliferation of work in education for citizenship, many of these citizenship theories and models in the academic literature, as well as in actual school curricula, do not acknowledge how identity and social location affects citizenship values and enactment. In particular, many feminist reproduction scholars, such as Arnot and Dillabough (2002) Lister (1997), and Foster (1996, 2000), and post-colonial scholars, such as Yuval-Davis (1997, 2005) and Mohanty (1998), argue that gender, race and cultural identity seem to be absent from these dominant concepts of citizenship.

Much of the theory on citizenship does not adequately address how gender -in particular-, and identity-in general- effect one’s engagement in civic and political life. There are also few links between feminist theorizing about citizenship and empirical work examining how gender plays out in educational policy and practice (Bernard-Powers, 2008). In addition to the gaps in theory, academics have argued that much of the existing research is limited because of the type of studies focused on exploring gender and the methodological approaches. Scholars like Fine (2006) and Pillow (2002) argue that traditional research methods do not accurately capture the range of participation of certain groups in society,
including women, minority groups and young people (Fine, 2006; Pillow, 2002; Savoie, 2005). Often, much of the empirical work in this area focuses on the formal political arena, ignoring a range of other activities that may be defined as civic engagement. Some large-scale research does include volunteer work and extra curricular activities as key areas of civic engagement (Hahn, 1996, 1998; Hahn et al, 2009; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). However, it is difficult to explore in depth how ideas of masculinity and femininity are shaping these patterns in larger-scale empirical work. In addition, some of these studies have been interpreted as suggesting that women and other groups are not as knowledgeable or interested in civic and political affairs, new research suggests this may not be true. Studies by Hicks and Holden (1995) and Yamashita (2006) have found that young people are interested in addressing current issues in their classrooms, but may be prevented from doing so by teachers or rigid curricula.

Another study has found that although young people were disenchanted and less knowledgeable about formal politics than other groups in society, they were actively involved in civic affairs in a variety of ways, including community service and online networking (MacKinnon et al., 2007). The young people in the study, as well as many researchers, did not identify these activities as civic participation. Moreover, scholars suggest that the engagement of other groups, such as women and minorities, may also be misunderstood and mischaracterized by researchers and policy-makers alike (Fine, 2005; Pillow, 2002; Savoie, 2005). Supporting this need, a recent report resulting from a series of national youth consultations in Canada found that although young people showed little knowledge about formal politics, it is “not youth that is disconnected from politics, it is political institutions, practices and cultures that are disconnected from youth” (MacKinnon, 2007). This mischaracterization of the involvement of young people likely also has serious implications for Canadian democracy.

By using a narrow definition of the citizen and civic participation, politicians and researchers effectively ignore the contributions of individuals and groups in society who may not be involved in political parties or elections. In turn, this misrepresentation may be preventing educators and policymakers from recognizing and addressing existing obstacles to civic and political participation. Therefore, like many scholars, I argue that educators and
policymakers must update our civic education to respond to the needs of our society and broaden the definition of citizenship and civic participation (Osler & Vincent 2003; Preece, 2002; Yuval-Davis 1997). In order to address these gaps, researchers must take new positions and focus on the voices and experiences of people often ignored to challenge the nature of citizenship and civic education.

Hahn’s 1996 and 1998 studies on political socialization of young people in five countries (Denmark, the Netherlands, The United States, Germany and the United Kingdom) has some findings that might suggest some potential explanations for why men and women have different patterns of civic and political involvement (Hahn, 1996, 1998). For example, Hahn found that although some students discussed some aspects about women and gender in history, nowhere did students say that they had studied gender equality in the political arena and nowhere did they study about grassroots political activity (of the kind that most women favor). In addition, it was rare that students were taught the history of women’s movements and the strategies used by women throughout history to fight for social recognition and equality around the globe. Moreover, the study found that there was no attention to existing gender inequalities and current strategies used to address these issues (Hahn, 1998). Many of the traits associated with femininity are incompatible with dominant ideas about what is needed to participate in certain citizenship spaces and structures, such as those connected with power, authority, leadership and aggression. Some, such as Bashevkin (2009) and Taft (2011) argue that this disconnect is significant in explaining the gendered patterns of participation of women and girls and the persistently low rates of women’s participation in leadership positions in business and government.

Since much of our knowledge about young women and their ideas about citizenship and civic engagement come from large-scale quantitative studies, we may have a sense of general patterns but not an in-depth understanding of the meaning or causes of these gender differences. Much of the dominant perception of gender and citizenship in education comes from large scale, quantitative research, providing a limited understanding about how girls and women engage with ideas about citizenship and political participation. In addition, though there is a growing body of research exploring the relationship of gender to education for citizenship, it often defines citizenship purely within the public spheres and ignores the
significance of womens’ community-based activism that may also be transnational and
global in scope (Miraftab, 2004).

Furthermore, underlying many of these studies is a biological determinism that
attributes these gendered patterns of participation to biological sex differences and not social
construction of gender: men prefer politics; women prefer charity. These kinds of
assumptions are dangerous and dichotomous but still pervasive even today (Bashevkin,
2009). As Bickmore (1997) suggests, girls and boys continue to get different messages about
the roles and behaviours in school. In addition, many of the large, quantitative studies are not
able to examine in depth the intersections of gender, race and cultural identity. Finally, there
are significant gaps in the research on young women and how the messages they receive in
school about their gender affects a range of issues, including their civic participation. Much
of the limited empirical research on young women in Canada explores psycho-social
problems such as eating disorders, self-esteem and body image and does not examine societal
or structural challenges to the participation of females in a range of activities (Osler &
Vincent, 2003; Savoie, 2005).

Educators and policymakers alike have searched for teaching and learning strategies
that prepare young people for informed and active citizenship both in and out of the school
contexts. Underlying much of these theories is the idea that by using particular strategies in
the classroom can give students the skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to be desirable
citizens. For example, researchers have found that open classroom discussion of
controversial public issues is associated with positive attitudes toward participation in civic
life (Hahn, 1998; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Furthermore, they contend that this kind of
classroom practice connects to the students’ civic participation as adults (Davies, 2005). In
addition, numerous studies suggest some techniques, pedagogical approaches and school-
based strategies have been shown to positively affect student’s civic attitudes, skills and
actions inside and outside of the school. Researchers have studied a range of practices in
classrooms and schools that encourage students’ future civic engagement. Some of these
strategies include school government, student councils, media literacy activities, and civic
action projects outside the classroom context.
According to these studies, the effects of these different strategies are very mixed on the future civic engagement of young people (Schwille & Amadeo, 2002). In contrast, a recent large-scale study conducted in inner city Chicago shows promising signs about what educational strategies may in fact have significant effect on minority youth and their civic participation. The study found that social action projects with a civic focus had a significant effect on the attitudes of youth towards civic engagement in the future. In fact, the researchers were so impressed by the study results, they argued that civic action projects might overcome socioeconomic factors preventing minorities and racialized youth from participation (Kahne & Sporte, 2006). However, it was unclear if they also provided opportunities for understanding and critically addressing systemic inequalities based on race, class or gender. These studies raise the question about whether or not these strategies will be equally successful for boys and girls. Despite the ideals of encouraging active participation of all students, a recent US study suggests that these pedagogical approaches to encourage civic participation may not be equally effective for males and females.

In addition to concerns about pedagogy and gender are more fundamental questions about what messages are being taught to young people about their gendered roles in society. Also, if you engage young people in open class discussions and inquiry-based learning, but do not talk about the historical and continued gendered nature of society, do young people have the opportunities to critically engage with dominant views on gender in order to change them? Research conducted in the 1990s in the United States concluded that civic education textbooks gave students the message that women are not suitable for public spaces or leadership (Avery & Simmons, 2001).

There is limited research done in Canada exploring girls’ and women’s perspectives on citizenship and patterns of civic engagement, although international studies reveal some tendencies that highlight areas for further exploration in the Canadian context (Preston et al., 2006). For example, an analysis of the large-scale study on civic education by the International Education Assoc. (IEA), found that there were gender differences in several areas, including political knowledge, attitudes and forms of civic participation. Another study suggested that women’s civic participation may be more local than that of men, but may simultaneously reach well beyond the national border, representing trans-national or trans-
cultural notions of citizenship (Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 2005). Finally, a Canadian study showed that females tend to have less knowledge of formal political and government structures and processes than their male counterparts. Moreover, women are more involved in informal civic activities, such as donating to charities or working with community or civil society organizations. In contrast, males are drawn to formal politics and political parties (Preston et al., 2006). In light of these findings, more qualitative research is needed, especially in Canada, to explore in depth the ways that young women think about citizenship and civic education, use a broader definition of citizenship and participation in order to capture the rich array, or as I have theorized it, the “spectrum of thick desire” that characterizes girls and young women’s citizenship concepts and engagement.

**Emergence of Girlhood Studies:**

**Girls Count and Counting Girls**

Historically, research and scholarly work has rarely considered the perspectives, experiences and lives of girls and young women. In addition, the work that has focused on girls has concentrated mainly on psychology, body image, sexuality, peer relationships, media consumption, and identity construction (Taft, 2011). In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of scholars in various fields, such as Carol Gilligan (1982, 1991, 1997) and Mary Pipher began to deliberately draw attention to the lives of girls, arguing they were an important and worthy area for further work. Much of this early research strove to define them as distinct from both boys and adult women. Gilligan’s early work (1982) found that there were indeed significant differences between boys and girls’ identity development, radically troubling the foundations of modern psychology and our knowledge of girls’ lives and gender identity more broadly. In addition, Gilligan argued that girls had different strategies and approaches for problem-solving and relationship-building that had largely been ignored and under-theorized by psychological research.

Another major finding from Gilligan’s work was the idea that gender inequality triggers a major inner conflict for adolescent girls, as they begin to learn that their societal acceptance and inclusion is dependent on others’ approval. In effect, at puberty, girls are faced with the realization that society values them more for their appearance and secondary
status as care-givers, than for their contributions or voice (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Joseph, 2005). The effect is that girls undergo a major crisis of self-esteem and a loss of voice as they enter adolescence and begin to develop their sexuality (Gilligan, 1994). As young children, girls are outspoken and un-self-conscious. In contrast, she argued, adolescent girls are socialized into silence and into adopting traits and behaviours that are associated with a particular kind of “hegemonic” femininity -- like passivity and obedience--in order to be considered desirable within hetero-normative ideas of gender (Gilligan, 1982; Pipher, 1998).

Girls are given the messages from family, school and society that they must be caring, self-sacrificing and serve the men in their lives. This dominant ideal of femininity is also raced, classed and deeply hetero-normative, though much of this early work did not sufficiently address these intersecting concerns and served to reinforce the notion of a kind of universal girlhood. As Joseph (2005) argues, the dominant message to girls is still that they should be passive, nurturing, caring and accommodating, where boys are told they should be independent, aggressive, self-sufficient and competitive (Joseph, 2005). Brown (1998) found in her work on girls’ anger, girls also learn that their expression of “masculine” emotions, such as aggression and anger is inappropriate and undesirable within the narrow framework of dominant culture (In Taft, 2011, p. 114). Pipher (1994)’s book, Reviving Ophelia, found a similar pattern of self-imposed silencing and growing female insecurity in adolescence. She argued that young women “crash and burn in a developmental Bermuda triangle” and suffer a panoply of mental health problems and self-esteem issues, from bulimia and anorexia to depression and anxiety at much higher rates than boys (Pipher, 1994, p. 19).

Scholars built on this growing literature, illuminating how young people are socialized into “appropriate” gendered behaviour, receiving a complex set of messages from family, school, the media and society about appropriate norms, behaviours and traits for men and women, a lifelong process that begins at birth. Pipher (1994) argued that girls become 'female impersonators' who come to believe that they must shrink their whole selves into small, crowded spaces". Growing up in a “girl-poisoning culture” (Pipher, 1994, p. 1), young women face a myriad of pressures that force adolescent women to choose between defining a strong, individual identity or fitting into traditional norms of femininity that constrict them.
In addition, girls are constructed in relationship to boys and men. Girls learn that one of their major expectations of them as females is to be caregivers for their male counterparts. Griffin’s 1982 study highlighted how girls learn to see themselves as needing to provide the emotional servicing of men (Griffin, 1982 in Bloustein, 2003). This process is inextricably tied to traditional notions of femininity and socially accepted behaviours and roles for women (Bem, 1968 in Joseph, 2005; Gilligan, 1994; Steinberg, 1996). Thus, adolescent girls face increasing pressures to conform to these roles, give up certain behaviours that are deemed more masculine, hold in their true feelings and be more accommodating to avoid being rejected by peers and by potential male suitors (Joseph, 2005, p. 28).

This particular dynamic between men and women is also reinforced by the continued sexual objectification of young women. Girls are socialized into basing a large part of their identities on their physical appearance and beauty. The relentless air-brushed images of rail-thin models and actresses produce a toxic atmosphere for girls as they develop their adult selves, resulting in a rash of negative consequences (Gilligan, 1982; Joseph, 2005, Newsom, 2011). A relentless wave of hypersexualized, commodified and decontextualized media imagery of women presents significant challenges for adolescent girls (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2011). The message to young women is that being beautiful is the key to acceptance and relationship with others and not what they think or contribute to society. Thus, many scholars, such as Gilligan (1982), Pipher, (1998) and Sensoy & DiAngelo (2011), the media teaches young women that their main role in society is to be attractive objects for the male gaze, and teaches men that their desires and opinions come first (Newsom, 2011).

While the research done in the 1980s and 90s about girls represented a paradigm shift in the study of girls, other scholars raised concerns about this earlier work. Many of these early studies focused on girls were in the field of psychology or social psychology and thus examined issues of self-esteem and development of individual girls, sometimes at the expense of looking at the issues through a lens of intersectionality or in relation to larger societal forces and structures. In addition, these early studies also traced this set of gendered messaging about femininity and expectations of girls to a myriad of negative individual consequences for girls including: higher rates of depression, anxiety, body image problems and mental health issues (Corbett, 2008; Dougherty, 1999; Orenstein, 1994, Pipher, 1998;).
Moreover, the earlier girlhood studies did not explore how race, class, cultural background and other aspects shaped girls’ experiences of being female (Finney, 2007, 2010; Mirza, 2000). Ohye and Faniel (1996) argued that young women of other minoritized groups must navigate a complex and contradictory set of messages in order to navigate their cultural and ethnic identity development in addition to their gender identity. In fact, racialized minority girls reported experiencing racism, classicism, xenophobic and homophobia on top of sexism. Moreover, Klonoff and Landrine, (1995) and (Joseph, 2005) found that girls of color report experiencing more sexism than White girls. Critics argue that much of this early exploration of girls’ lives focused on them as subjects of socialization and objects of sexualization, leaving out the many ways that they resist, adapt to and act against these complex forces (Finney, 2007; Gaskell, 1989; Taft, 2011).

**Getting Canadian Girls Into Citizenship Education**

Having briefly surveyed the landscape of citizenship education in Canada, where do girls fit in? What does current research in this area tell us about how schooling affects young people’s civic attitudes and patterns of civic involvement? What kinds of strategies have been shown to encourage students to become active citizens inside and outside of school, and how does their gender or race affect these patterns?

Understanding the experiences of girls in citizenship education in Canada cannot be done without taking into account how discourses of diversity and multiculturalism interact with ideas about gender. With increasing security concerns, governments and groups of all persuasions fear losing control, and seek symbols of their successful cultural survival. In her book, *Of Saris and Miniskirts* (2003), Handa describes how girls have come to embody these global struggles, serving as a kind of symbol of economic, political or cultural identity. Girls are caught between contradictory forces between the state and their minoritized community, as models of family honour (Handa, 2003).

Some argue that when measured in relationship to a White, male identity, minorities – especially minority girls, are constructed as “deviant” and unable to fit in to the concept of Canadian identity and live up to the idealized Canadian citizen (Handa, 2003; Hernandez, 1998). Within the context of transnational migration and the “war on terror”, some groups
often feel the pressure to conform and assimilate into the larger, White Christian society. Shachar (2005), a legal scholar, describes this process as a kind of reactive culturalism, where minority communities may resurrect more rigid concepts of cultural, racial, ethnic or religious identity and harden the borders of inclusion in order to preserve their group solidarity and ensure their survival. Many of the girls interviewed, along with their families, seemed to have a sense of optimism about their future and most families seemed to have faith in their daughters’ abilities and careers (Basit, 1997, p. 428). Even though schools are seen as a means for social mobility, many parents also view them as a threat to their daughters (Basit, 1997, p. 426). The tension arises, because these young women, although planning their education and careers, are still seen as the public face of their families and are responsible for guarding their honor in the community (Basit, 1997, p. 429).

The process of immigrating to a new country can be liberating for some girls, as new ideas about gender equity result in increased participation, and higher educational and career aspirations. When people emigrate and become part of a larger one, like Canada, it is normal for them to self-segregate to some degree in order to find some level of comfort and to preserve certain practices that they feel give them a sense of belonging. In addition, these practices are often seen as important for ensuring the survival of this ethnic identity. Often parents resurrect more traditional practices to seek validation from their own community so they can be seen as good parents and people of high morals (Desai, 2000, p. 91). They are seeking social status and are also reacting to the structures of dominance they are facing in their adopted country (Desai, 2000, p. 12).

Many immigrants move to Canada because they believed that the increased access and quality of education in their adopted country would give their children, daughters included, a better life. They place a great deal of importance on their children’s education and believe it will help them find better economic prospects. In several studies, most parents had high aspirations for their daughters’ educations and careers, in spite of their own working class status (Basit, 1997, p. 426, Desai, 2000). However, a 2000 study commissioned by Immigration and Citizenship Canada revealed some surprising results. The study, designed to explore challenges within the South Asian youth community in Toronto, found that there were “no significant differences in educational expectations” for males and females (Desai,
This study revealed an interesting and telling contrast, between the high academic expectations of girls, while simultaneously recognizing the simultaneous and contradictory messages about “femininity” and girls’ roles. This discrepancy points to an interesting area for further research to understand the relationship between socialization and ideas of femininity, academic success, and civic participation. Consequently, as Handa (2003) describes, many girls choose to live a double life, acting and dressing one way at home and another at school. Because of these competing expectations of nation and ethnocultural group, girls are in the middle of a tug of war between the nation and their cultural community. In this way, female students must choose between being a “good girl” in their community and a “good citizen” in the larger political community (Handa, 2003).

According to Talbani and Hasanali’s (2000) research, the South Asian community in Canada uses several techniques to maintain clear gender roles and social hierarchy between the sexes. The researchers interviewed 22 South Asian girls of various religions and backgrounds in the Montreal area to examine the techniques families used to socialize their girls into gender roles (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). The two key techniques are the control over girls’ socialization process, their comings and goings and their relationship with the opposite sex, and the marriage of their daughters. The process of socialization is the key way of preparing children for social interaction based on core cultural values (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000, p. 616). Most parents interviewed agreed that Western parents give their children too much freedom, and believed that they do not care as much about their children (Basit, 1997, p. 432).

Many of the girls interviewed appeared to be struggling with certain major contradictions in their own viewpoints and values, expressing a certain ambivalence about which practices to continue, both within their religion and culture as well as within the larger Western society (Basit, 1997, p. 435). The complexity of identity is so great that individuals in liberal democracies who are both women and minorities experience a kind of schizophrenic lifestyle, changing their identity and personality depending on the context. Many girls report that their parents put strict rules on their comings and goings and their general socialization process, and that they were forced to lead two separate lives, their private life (within the family and community) and their public life (at school and with their
peers). There is little documentation on what this does to their mental health, although several girls interviewed in the 2005 study in Toronto reported that they knew of other girls who were suffering from depression (Desai, 2005, p. 15). Within the South Asian community, they argue, families adopt a more traditional concept of gender roles, and girls perceive that their culture was more controlling than all other cultures in Canada and that their parents and communities had stricter regulations on their socialization process (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000).

Aside from a select few studies (Hahn, 1996; Torney-Purta et al., 2001), it is difficult to find empirical research critically examining issues of citizenship and democracy from the perspectives of girls. Recent Canadian studies revealed the macro tensions around identity and citizenship played out in girls’ lives and attitudes, especially in their choices of clothing, appearances and behaviour. Many of the girls interviewed reported that “being a girl” was stressful because of a multitude of pressures placed on them by family, community and society. They described how society had significant expectations of them, placing rigid restrictions on them, their movements, appearance and behaviour (Riviere, 2005, p. 346). Interviews with many girls illustrated how girls internalized these expectations to police themselves and each other. Riviere’s analysis of the micro-politics between and among girls revealed how the girls’ views of gender were indexed by global power relations and relied on their social or cultural capital. Girls who had more social or cultural capital had more positive views of being a girl than those who had less capital (Riviere, 2005, p. 347). Many girls interviewed in Riviere and Wolmer’s studies reveal that most girls interviewed had traditional, hegemonic views of gender and perceived their identity as a female as a static, stable concept (Riviere, 2005, p. 349). Despite these few studies, we still need more empirical work that features the voices and experiences of girls and explores how their lived experiences connect to larger social forces and the discourses around identity and education.

In Taft (2011)’s study about girls’ activism across the Americas, she found that the many girls she interviewed had a strong sense of commitment to their multiple communities and a strong sense of the “public good”. In spite of structural barriers of age, gender, class or culture, the young women she talked to believed in the importance of making a difference and improving lives for other people, not just themselves. It remains unclear to what degree
formal civic education recognizes and responds to the unique challenges facing girls and young women. More work needs to be done in this area, examining the complex interplay of forces that shape young people’s ideas of citizenship and the role that schooling plays in their participation in their families, schools and communities.

**Education for Citizenship in Canadian Curricula**

In this thesis, I will examine how girls’ think about many of these issues and what they are learning about what is expected of them as girls, as well as their notions of citizenship and participation in a pluralistic democracy. This thesis will explore some of the following questions: If girls are still being taught many of the traits associated with hegemonic femininity, are they being directed into only certain types of citizen participation and discouraged from other? The question remains, how do these messages about femininity and appropriate gender behavior and expectations for girls impact their sense of self and the ways in which they see their roles as adults and as citizens? How do these messages about appropriate femininity and masculinity affect their conceptualization of citizenship and the ways they will enact what they learn about their citizen roles and the ways they will develop their places in their families, schools and society?

Education scholars, both of the liberal and critical traditions have pointed out gender bias in the curriculum and content of schooling, even within a multicultural framework supposedly committed to diversity (Weiler, 1998, p. 26, Tupper, 2002). In Canada, Tupper (2002) has argued that “traditional 'masculine' understandings of citizenship appear to permeate social studies content and are lived in public spaces within the boundaries of the nation state” (Tupper, 2002, p. 1). For many girls, schooling is a subtractive process, where girls learn to repress, hide, deny parts of their identity, and privilege others (Erkut et al., 1994). In this way, Gewinner (2002) argues schools fail to support the success of girls in self-esteem, positive identity and forces girls to construct their identity within a matrix of domination (Gewinner, 2002, p. 2). Schools, families and communities help to socialize children into the inevitability of traditional sex roles (Okin, 1999, p. 226) so that girls and women gradually accept life as a series of individual choices where all individuals have the equal opportunity to succeed in society (Jubas, 2006, p. 568).
With the emergence of critical pedagogy, feminist and post-modern theorists such as Apple (1971), Giroux (1992), and Weiler (1998) began to question the notion of a linear, meta-narrative which privileges one, White, male version of identity, citizenship over a plurality of others (Blair & Holland, 1993, p. 120). Blair and Holland resist the linear evolution of history that reduces complex phenomena into essentialist, linear notions of causation (Blair & Holland, 1993, p. 131). They argue that a “master narrative” results in silencing a multiplicity of voices, perspectives and experiences (Giroux, 1992, p. 120). Foucault’s critiques of power and hegemony warn of the totalizing of theory that is insufficient to understand the complexity of the human experience (Blair & Holland, 1993, p. 132).

Hernandez (1997) believes that exploring heterogeneity and allowing for conflicts and tensions to be explored within the public discourse on multiculturalism and education will (help) guard against the dictatorship of a forced consensus and the overemphasizing of the individual. This more inclusive and multifaceted narrative of life, of national identity and citizenship, is not only more reflective of reality, but is also more likely to guarantee a healthy and vibrant democratic society (Hernandez, 1997, p. 32).

Critical pedagogists argue that we must look at the connections between the micro, meso and macro forces in society, between individual human agency and the larger political, social and economic forces. In addition, we must analyze power structures and relationships, where human agency and resistance occur (Hernandez, 1997, p. 10). Individuals perceive themselves not only as subjects or victims of systems, but also authors and agents of their own experience and have many associations with more than one group, one culture, or one legal system (Shachar, 2005, p. 86). This push and pull between individual agency and structures of power that reproduce dominant values will play a central part of my analytical framework as I seek to understand the relationship between girls’ conceptualization and enactment of their citizen-girl roles. I will discuss this relationship further in the next section.
Analytical Framework

Spectrum of Thick Desire:
Situating the Wide Spectrum of Girls’ Desires, Interests, Needs

The interests, values and activities of these girls represent what Fine and McClelland (2011) have described as “thick desire”: a wide continuum of social, political, economic, intellectual and emotional roles. This continuum also explores the connections between their personal engagements within the private sphere, and their conceptualization and enactment of citizenship within the public sphere. Moreover, these girls’ interests are also situated within a complex web of discourses that exist within their families, schools, communities and society at large. Therefore, it would be inadequate to present these desires without examining how they are connected to systems and structures of power, and how dominant societal discourses affect which concepts rise to the surface, which are smothered and which are silenced entirely.

In their 2011 article, Fine and McClelland use the concept of “thick desire” to understand young women, their perspectives on sexuality, and the connection to the web of ideologies, policies, family, school and societal norms in which they live (p. 244). I am using this concept to theorize the incredible richness of interests, values and desires of the girls in my study in relation to their perceptions of themselves and their current and future roles in family, community, school and society. Thus, as Fine and McClelland convincingly argue: “Women (and men) are entitled to and psychologically motivated toward thick desire: a broad range of yearnings for meaningful intellectual, political and social engagement, the possibility of financial independence, sexual and reproductive freedom, protection from racialized, homophobic and sexualized violence, and a way to imagine living in the future tense” (McClelland & Fine, 2011, p. 244). In my view, this concept very aptly describes the interests and civic engagement of the seven girls with whom I worked over the course of this project. Moreover, I argue that their participation as citizens cannot be understood as distinct from their participation in their families, schools or communities (Preston et al., 2006, p. 1637). Thus, to quote the feminist adage, the personal is inherently political, and the public is inherently connected to the private.
Most often, the “private” is viewed as irrelevant to citizenship. Lister (1997) maintained that "the public-private divide is pivotal to women's longstanding exclusion from full citizenship in both theory and practice" (p.6). In fact, many theorists, researchers and educators ignore the relationship between the family and the state, between private and public roles, and between the personal and the political (Bernard-Powers, 2008, p. 321; Foster, 1999). It would be inadequate, therefore, to examine these girls’ after-school activities, voting, and volunteer work without understanding how they are socialized in their families and what messages they are getting about their families’ expectations of them as girls. Indeed, as feminists have argued for decades, the structures of the modern nation-state, which includes schooling, are built upon a strict divide between the public and the private, relegating women to a second-class status. Thus, using the notion of “thick desire”, I am conceptualizing these spheres as inextricably linked.

In addition, as Pateman (1988) argues, there is no acknowledgement that the functioning of the public society, its structures and systems, are to a large degree dependent on the unacknowledged contribution of women within families and households in the private sphere. This relationship is described by Pateman as the “patriarchal dividend” and is as of yet, unacknowledged and under-theorized in much teaching and learning of citizenship in Canada and elsewhere. Aikman and Unterhalter (2005, p. 111) argue that education is a space that exists in between the public and the private spheres of society that allows young people to explore, develop, and challenge roles and identities in both spheres. However, teachers and students do not have many opportunities to examine this relationship in schooling. My concept of “thick desire” and the contexts in which it is situated recognizes the relationship of girls’ private and public roles and identities.

Additionally, I am drawing on McClelland and Fine’s (2008) conceptualization of girls’ lives and how they act upon, are situated in, and are shaped by complex, powerful forces within society, while also simultaneously acting against them. In Writing on Cellophane, they describe how girls’ sexual desires are wrapped in layers of cellophane, representing the layers of influences that shape and serve to impact, obstruct and bury their inner needs, motivations and curiosities related to sexuality. Though they focus in particular on sexuality, I am adapting their concept of the layers of cellophane to explore the broad
range of interests, perspectives and activities of young women, well beyond those related to sex or intimacy. However, this diversity of yearnings and interests is, as McClelland and Fine (2008) describe, highly regulated by the confluence of ideas related to issues of race, gender, class, culture, religion and other social identities.

For my analysis, I will draw on this concept to explore the complex web of discourses that shape these girls’ ideas and patterns of civic participation and the relationship between girls’ “thick desire” and sense of agency as situated within the layers of cellophane that influence their ideas and enactment of citizenship. In addition, I will examine connections, overlaps and discrepancies between what they are learning about their roles as females and as citizens. In my review of the theoretical and research literature, I identified significant disconnect between how we socialize girls and boys into roles and what they are learning in schools about their roles as citizens. This distinction can have serious consequences on how young people understand their place in society. For example, if accepted notions of leadership and civic participation are associated with traditional definitions of masculinity, what implications does it have for girls and women going into positions of leadership in civic, economic, political and family life? In addition, what are the consequences for society in general if it defines contributions to civic and political life without recognition of the gendered roles we play in society and the divide between private and public life?

My intent is not to create a new set of discourses codified into a hierarchy, nor do I mean to suggest that girls are mere passive victims of discourse. On the contrary, I will argue that the young women who participated in Project Citizen-Girl are citizens, objects of gender socialization, subjects of the nation, and agents of change all simultaneously. Though they are “reproduced” and continue in many ways to be socialized into traditionally feminine behaviour, they also describe the ways they resist and adapt these expectations. In addition, looking at their lives through a lens of intersectionality revealed how their experiences of being girl-citizens are shaped by other identity markers, such as race, class, culture and geography (Denis, 2008, Finney, 2007; Riviere, 2005).
Conclusion

Girls and women have a complex, contested and contradictory relationship to schooling. The public debates about identity, individual and group rights are embodied in the choices, behaviour, dress and actions of girls. In some ways, they are post-modern beings living in a modernist structure. On the one hand, education in general (and formal schooling in particular) is a powerful tool for girls to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for self-determination and gain access to citizenship spaces. On the other hand, education continues to ignore the contributions of women, reproducing gender inequalities in society and civic and political spaces by reinforcing the idea that differences between males and females are based on biological sex and therefore must not be challenged. My conceptual framework is grounded in different theories that help to understand the place of girls and women in education for citizenship and democracy, and the ways that they construct their own identities and sense of belonging as girl-citizens. The first set of theories is education for democratic citizenship. These theories argue that a central role of education is to prepare all individual citizens for active, engaged and full citizenship, regardless of race, class, sexuality or gender. Despite the pervasive belief that education leads to active and full participation for all citizens, many critiques exist. There is an ongoing debate about how to define citizenship, how education for citizenship should relate to students’ identities, and whose definitions of citizenship should take precedence in the formal teaching and learning of citizenship.

To address these challenges, I argue for a broadening of the definition of citizenship and civic engagement, and an adoption of innovative, bottom-up methods to capture a more accurate understanding of participation of young people, women and minority groups in Canadian society (MacKinnon, 2007). As Bickmore (1997) suggests, we need to include a broader notion of citizenship and civic participation that rejects the dichotomy between private and public life (Miraftab, 2004) and “involves a wide range of activities beyond government related politics that have been dominated by men’s concerns” throughout history”.

Chapter 3
Methodology:
Reimagining Roles

We resist the hegemonic dominance of feminist theory by continuing to insist it is a theory in the making, that we must necessarily criticize, question, reexamine and explore new possibilities. (hooks, 2009, p. 39)

Figure 2. I learned that we actually have power over the things that surround us... I think I learned this as we spoke of our pictures and problems in our society. Gender inequality still exists and is terrible but the girls, and [we were able to] think of ways to solve the issues we noticed. We are all young girls of many ethnicities and values but we all have something in our hearts: the belief in the possibility of a better day, a day of no injustice and hate. A little belief and hope can bring you a long way. (Mihika)

Introduction

Too often, girls are the subjects of the camera’s gaze, de-contextualized and displayed as objects without agency and identity. In this chapter, I provide a complete narrative account of my research process where I explain the rationale for this study, provide details on my selection of participants, outline my research strategies, and explain the analysis process. One central reason for choosing a participatory visual methodology was to disrupt the traditional
relationship of photographer and subject (and researcher and participant) by putting cameras into the hands of girls to explore gender and civic action through their eyes.

To this end, I have divided this chapter in 5 sections: (a) Beginning: where I present the rationale and background for this methodology; (b) People and Places: In this section, I describe how I selected the setting and participants for my study by developing a connection with Plan Canada’s Girls Speakers Bureau; (c) Research Process: where I describe the research strategies including the semi-structured interviews, the photovoice project and the document analysis; (d) Analysis: In this part, I describe my process for analyzing the multiple sources of data; (e) Researcher Reflexivity: Here, I reflect on the research methodology (challenges and benefits), my own personal location and subjectivity in relation to the study, and issues of trustworthiness and credibility.

**Beginning**

As Canada becomes increasingly diverse, there is a growing imperative for teachers, policymakers, and educators to consider how to prepare young people to be informed and engaged citizens, not only in a Canadian context, but participants in the larger global community as well. As current research has shown, despite Canada’s relatively gender egalitarian values and official multicultural policies, women and racialized minorities in Canada are not well represented in Canadian political institutions (Bashevkin, 2010, Hausman et al, 2010, Plan Canada, 2011).

In my study, I wanted to explore girls’ perspectives about gender and citizenship and what it means for them to be active participants in society. In addition, it was important for me to have them describe their own experiences in a variety of contexts and reflect on how they define their own identities and their notions of citizenship by using what might be called “thick description” of a particular context (Bloomfield & Volpe, 2008, p. 69). As previously discussed, there is limited research exploring concepts of civic participation and citizenship

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3 For the actual research protocols for the semistructured interviews and photovoice process, please see the appendices.
from the perspectives of young women and much of the existing studies related to girls are problematic for both theoretical and methodological reasons (Arnot & Dillabough, 2002; Lather, 1992; Lister, 1997; Savoie, 2005; Pillow, 2002). As some scholars have pointed out, many studies that do examine young people’s ideas of civic participation positions youth, and girls in particular—as deficient of civic values, devaluing their perspectives and continuing to view them as deficient of the dominant ideals of citizenship (Fine, 2005; Savoie, 2005). Other empirical work examining gendered patterns in civic engagement are large quantitative studies that are not able to explore in depth the reasons and contexts explaining differences in men’s and women’s participation. This is a gap in the literature that I aim to address in part with this study.

Recognizing that the participants were best positioned to speak about their own lived experiences, I sought to respond to theoretical and methodological imperatives discussed previously by repositioning girls as central to the research (instead of the mere objects of it), using a combination of qualitative, arts-based methods to develop a democratic inquiry process. By following these girls as they documented their lives through both text and visuals, this study explored their own identities, their learning of gender, and their engagement in civic life. In addition, it gave them time and space to create images of girls and young women as counter to the dominant pictures in the mainstream media. In this way, I hoped to add their voices to our theoretical and practical understanding of education for citizenship in a Canadian context.

Photovoice is a participatory action research (PAR) method where participants are given cameras to record their lives in answer to the research questions (Baker & Wang, 2006; Wang, Ling & Ling, 2008). Participants select and speak about their images, thus revealing their own natural priorities and values (Cole & Knowles 2008; Mitchell & Allnutt, 2008; Prosser & Burke 2008; Wang & Baker 2006). It draws on feminist theories, Freireian approaches to community development, critical pedagogy and participatory media allowing the research participants to identify for themselves their own issues, ideas and priorities as well as identifying strategies to address them. In addition, I was drawn to photovoice because it seemed to be most convenient and interesting to the participants, all of whom had access to a digital camera and had some familiarity with photography.
I selected photovoice for the following reasons: 1) Collaboration. Based on the notion that researcher and participants are involved in a co-construction of knowledge and that they do so in relation not only to the topic but to each other as well. I invited the girls to make suggestions about activities for our research meetings and to help plan the data representation process (exhibit). In this way, I wanted to acknowledge the fact that they were experts on their own lives and experiences of being girl-citizens (Torre, 2006) 2) Visual and narrative representation. Finally, this process appealed to me because it allowed the girls to deconstruct the passive, hyper-sexualized images of females that traditionally dominate our popular media. Instead of being the objects of pictures, the girls were in control of taking and choosing the images they most wanted to portray. 3) Combination of group and individual methods.

*Figure 3. Photo taken at a photovoice meeting where girls are looking at someone’s photographs.*

Building on concepts taken from narrative research, PAR and more traditional focus groups, I employed a group process where we could build a sense of community so the girls could further stimulate and challenge each other’s thinking. I also wanted to have one on one time with the girls where I was able to talk to them individually about more personal and potentially sensitive topics, which they might not share in a group setting.

Arts-informed research (such as photovoice) has been used in a variety of ways to draw attention to vulnerable and excluded members of society. A study by Marilyn Martin revealed how photographs had a significant effect on getting people involved in HIV/AIDS activism and prevention (Mitchell & Allnut, 2008), while another by Caroline Wang (1999)
drew attention to the issues facing rural Chinese women living in poverty. Furthermore, organizations like UNICEF and Save the Children frequently employ visual methods, such as drawings, photographs and written blogs to contribute the perspectives of young people to international discourses on children’s rights and education (Prosser & Burke, 2008).

Though the idea of arts-informed research may appear new to some, there is a long history of using visual images in research in anthropology and ethnography (Harrison, 2002), as well as in the physical sciences and health research (Lorenz, 2010; Tao & Mitchell; 2010; Ungar et al., 2007; Vaughn et al., 2009; Virgi & Mitchell, 2011). Many argue that images can have multiple meanings and can capture complex and elusive concepts and aspects of knowledge otherwise ignored and hidden by words alone (Cole, 2004; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Weber, 2008). In this way, some suggest that research that integrates visual elements is more accessible to nonacademic audiences and might also be more effective than pure text in provoking people into meaningful social action based on the research process (Prosser & Burke, 2008, Wang & Baker 2008; Weber 2008). In addition, Prosser and Burke (2008) suggest that young people develop visual skills very early and now live in an environment that is saturated with visual media, including photography, television, film and video and online media. Words and academic language can be alienating and may act to exclude the participants who sometimes lack the appropriate words and discourses to respond to traditional text-based research methods. In this way, the girls could reflect and represent their lived experiences while also being able to share the findings with an audience beyond the traditional academic audience. These arguments provided a strong rationale for using photovoice for this study (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Harrison, 2002; Mitchell & Allnutt, 2008).
Figure 4. A photograph of one of our meetings where two girls could not attend in person and had to join via Skype video chat.

People and Places

In designing my study, I wanted to work with girls in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) who could be described as “active girl-citizens” because of their participation in a range of civic activities and organizations. I sought to find a group that came from a variety of racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, where I showed the diversity and complexity within a group, with particular attention to the intersections of multiple identities (Collins, 2009; Davis, 2008). This approach is described as intra-group analyses (Davis, 2008). Initially, I wanted to recruit girls through a number of community organizations that ran programs specifically for girls in the Toronto area, which is how I learned about the Because I’m a Girl campaign (BIAAG), organized by Plan Canada.

In order to recruit participants, I used purposive sampling to attract girls who met my criteria. Bernard (2000) argues that purposive and nonrandom sampling is appropriate for learning about peoples’ lived experiences when learning about “their lives” is your research intent (Bernard, 2000, p. 13). I wanted to work closely with a group of young women who met the following criteria: (a)“civically active”, (b) interested in exploring and understanding their own identities as females (in an intersectional manner) and (c) sharing a personal interest in girls’ rights and gender equality. I was looking for girls who would be able to critically reflect on their experiences of schooling, in particular the messages they were
getting about their roles as citizens. In addition, I wanted them to analyze how these messages connected to (or did not connect to) to their own lives and identities. I contacted a number of Toronto-based NGOs related to education and development within a global context in order to find girls who were not only active locally, but were thinking about citizenship and civic action within a global context as well.

**Collaborating with Plan Canada, Girls’ Speakers Bureau (GSB)**

Although I contacted a number of NGOs, I found that there were a limited number of programs related to girls that fit my criteria and provided spaces for girls to critically analyze their experiences as female-citizens. In the course of my research, I discovered the advertisements for the (BIAAG) programme in subway stations and posted on Toronto city streets. I subsequently contacted the coordinator, who invited me to attend a meeting of the (BIAAG) club and the Girls’ Speakers Bureau (GSB) at Plan Canada. Plan Canada is an international NGO that provides a range of community development programs in the Global South, with particular focus on girls’ rights and girls’ education. They began a marketing program to gain public support for their “overseas” programming called the Because I’m a Girl campaign, which included a large scale advertising campaign in Canada, and in particular in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

About a year prior to the beginning of my study in the fall of 2010, Plan Canada sought to create a group for girls in the GTA who were interested in becoming youth delegates on the issues of gender equality and girls’ rights. Plan contacted local community programs for girls and successfully recruited several from an inner city community (Scarborough) to form the Girls Speakers Bureau to join the group. The GSB provided them with a forum for sharing thoughts, discussions, research etc as well as providing them with support and training on a range of issues including: public speaking, leadership, and advocacy. Plan wanted to attract girls of color and immigrant girls to start a group and contacted local organizations such as the YWCA for recruitment.

In October of 2010, I began attending their meetings and talking to the girls about their interest in participating in my study as co-researchers in a photovoice project. When I
arrived at the Plan offices, I noticed that the walls were a mix of bright colors with large black and White photographs of children from the “developing world”. The girls in BIAAG began arriving, chattering loudly and unselfconsciously, updating each other on their lives since their last meeting and helping themselves to drinks and snacks.

While I was helping the Plan coordinator organize the event, the girls skipped from topic to topic, ranging from religion to activism, the objectification of women and vampire shows on television. The girls talked openly about race, religion, sexuality and gender and the relationships between all their multiple identities. A couple of the girls had just returned from speaking at an event in Ottawa related to Plan’s annual report about girls, which had included policymakers, educators and researchers all of whom were doing work relevant to girls. They were recounting some stories from the event when one girl talked about the term “intersectionality” and how it had been used by some of the “adults” and “experts” at the event. When I heard the girls’ conversation, I thought at once that this group of young women would be excellent potential participants for my study.

Setting

Because of my collaboration with Plan Canada, the organization initially offered me the use of its offices for our Citizen-Girl meetings and also the possible use of digital cameras for the girls to use in the project. After a lengthy process of discussion, emailing and online coordination, the girls decided to host our regular meetings on Saturdays, which were decided to be the most convenient day for all the girls. We held one or two meetings at the Plan offices, but ended up hosting our meetings at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where I had my graduate student office and could get us free space on Saturdays. In addition, the OISE building is right on the subway line, which proved the most convenient location for the girls. Because all the girls were coming in from various distances (the longest was almost two hours), the project covered their transportation and provided food and drinks for them during the meetings.
Participants

The participants’ ages ranged from 14 to 19, all of whom were members of the Girls Speakers Bureau of the Because I am a Girl program. One girl was Jamaican Canadian though born in Canada, two girls whose families came originally from Sri Lanka, two other girls’ families had moved from China when they were young, one girl was Chinese-Polish and the seventh girl was third generation Canadian, from English and Croatian backgrounds. Of the seven girls, five of them went to schools situated in what would be considered urban areas, while one girl attended a school in a suburb of Toronto and the final girl describes her school as in a “town” about an hour outside the GTA. Of the seven participants, the youngest was 14 years old and in Grade 9, four other girls were aged 15 and in Grade 10, another one was 17 and in her senior year of high school and the final girl was 18 years old and in her first year at the University of Toronto (but who grew up in the GTA).

The girls reported being involved in a wide variety of clubs and volunteer activities in their schools and in the different communities in which they live. These range from the local YWCA, school leadership clubs, the school environmental club, student government and volunteer work in their local ethnic or cultural community. Their level of activism or civic and political involvement was somewhat different as well, from only just having joined the BIAAG to being a leader of a school’s social justice club or a participant in the Model United Nations. The geographic scope of their activities also varied from being highly local (talking with seniors in their neighbourhood seniors’ home), to spending their spring break building houses with Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans.

Ethics and Ensuring Community Safety

Conducting a collaborative research process with a group of girls, all under the age of 18, where they took photos of people definitely presented a number of possible ethical concerns. In order to address these issues, I took a number of measures to ensure the safety of my participants as well as any people of whom they might take photos, especially since the final phase of the inquiry process was a public photo display. To begin, I spent a couple of months attending their GSB meetings to get to know them well and talk to them in detail about the photovoice project. After extensive discussion of ethics and consent, all the girls
read and signed a letter of consent, which was written in plain language and that spelled out in detail all phases of the collaborative inquiry process (including the final public photo exhibit). I facilitated a workshop that briefly simulated the entire photovoice process and showed them other examples of studies where it had been used. Upon the request of Plan Canada, I also met with one of their child protection officers to go through a short training on child protection procedures and principles to ensure an ethical research process while working in collaboration with Plan Canada and the girls from the GSB. Finally, I had all the girls under 18 provide a letter of consent from a parent or guardian and in one case met in person with one girl’s mother to explain the project.

The consent forms (for both the girls and their guardians) presented a number of options for participation and giving their consent to participate in the study, as well as another option for sharing their images with other participants as well as in a public forum (exhibit) as part of the data representation phase of the work. Finally, I continuously reminded the participants that they could withdraw consent at anytime. In fact, one participant decided she didn’t want to share certain photos in the public exhibit and we removed them from our selection. This procedure is again in line with guidelines proposed by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) and Laura Lorenz (2010) in her study on brain injury survivors.

Prior to beginning the photovoice project, we had a lengthy discussion about principles for taking pictures in an ethical manner and I explained the process in detail, and how to acquire the consent from any people whom they might photograph for the project. These guidelines also follow those by other researchers (Lorenz, 2010; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). After the initial discussion of consent, we came up with a list of guidelines about how to do acquire consent from people so they could take their photographs. Some of these guidelines included explaining the project to people, acquiring their verbal consent and letting them know they can also withdraw consent at any point.
Researcher Reflections

I was excited to hear the girls’ conversations the first time I was invited to join one of the meetings of the Girls Speakers Bureau* at Plan Canada. Listening to the richness of their conversations, I felt like we could fairly easily relate to each other and develop a good rapport so we could develop a productive collaborative inquiry process over the course of the next year. They seemed curious, critically-minded and able to articulate their own opinions and experiences easily. I quickly realized that their participation in the Girls Speakers Bureau had allowed them to witness and participate in conversations about gender and identity to which most girls in Canada (and indeed the world) do not have access. Two girls talked about their participation in the opening of the new United Nations agency for Women in New York as youth delegates. Another girl had spoken at a conference about girls, organized by Plan Canada listening to researchers, policymakers and educators sharing research and information related to girls’ lives. I quickly recognized that the girls’ access to these spaces and ideas could give them very interesting perspectives on gender, identity and citizenship. In addition, if these girls, who were interested in gender equality and actively participating in critical conversations about gender, were witnessing continued gender stereotyping, then it is likely that many other girls would also be subjected to gendered messaging. However, other girls may not have the same kinds of critical spaces as these girls. It was a great opportunity to follow along with them as they made sense of all the things they were seeing and hearing, especially in relationship to their own lives and school experiences.

Initially, I purposefully sought out girls who were racialized minorities or first generation Canadians because I believed that they would be best placed to explore the intersections of race, gender and culture, and the had potential for understanding multiple layers of oppression (gender/race/immigrant status). Interestingly, all of the girls who belonged to the GSB were girls of colour, at least for the first couple of meetings that I attended. Eventually, however, a young White girl joined the group and expressed interest in participating in the “Citizen-Girl” project. Based on the concept of an intra-group intersectional analysis (Denis, 2008), I modified my initial selection criteria in order to include her in the study. Since I was seeking to find a mixed group of girls who might be considered “active girl-citizens”, I judged that adding her perspective to the group was a
strategic choice that could help us better explore how the girls felt that their race and cultural background related to their perspectives on gender and civic participation.

**Inquiry Process**

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

I conducted a one-hour semi-structured interview with each participant before the photovoice project began. Interviews are a key tool in qualitative research (Bloomfield & Volpe, 2008) because they allow the researcher to understand the world from the point of view of the participant, to “unfold the meanings of people’s experiences and lives from their perspectives (Kvale, 1996). Interviewing also begins with the underlying assumption that the perspectives of people are meaningful and knowable and that we are able to access them through interviewing (Patton, 1990). With these ideas in mind, it was important for me to have one-on-one time with the participants to explore more personal issues from their backgrounds and be able to get a clearer sense of their individual perspectives and experiences.

I did have a number of questions that I asked all participants, but also let them lead me in certain directions individually, shaping the content of each interview. In addition, I also encouraged them to provide me with feedback about the content and the process and make suggestions for other questions or topics that we should discuss in the interview or the photovoice project. Several girls added questions to the interview and made suggestions, including starting each meeting with a kind of “table topics” or “hot topics”, where they could talk about current events and any news or personal stories that they might want to share in our meetings. In addition, another recommendation was for them to bring in any relevant articles or photos that they could find from newspapers or magazines for the discussion as well. This suggestion became a very rich addition to the data collection process.

**Photovoice Process**

I learned that we actually have power over the things that surround us. Whether it's the people: our family or friends, or things in our school, we can
make a difference. I think I learned this as we spoke of our pictures and problems in our society. Gender inequality still exists and is terrible but the girls, and I were still able to think of ways of solving the issues we noticed. We are all young girls of many ethnicities and values but we all have something in our hearts; the belief for a better day, a day of no injustice and hate. A little belief and hope can bring you a long way. (Mihika)

The method of using photovoice is grounded in theories drawn from feminism, critical pedagogy, community-based research and participatory action research (Baker & Wang, 2006; Wang, Ling & Ling, 2008). Since the goal of this study is to explore in depth the experiences, perspectives and voices of young women, this interactive, qualitative approach was an appropriate choice of methodology. My methodological approach draws on the ideas of knowledge as socially constructed, the researcher as moral inquirer, and the inquiry process as emerging out of interaction between researcher and participants (Fine, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Lather, 1992; Pillow, 2002). The idea of a participatory arts-based approach allowed for research to be “on, for and with” people, as opposed to making participants passive subjects of an expert researcher (Harrison, 2002; Mitchell & Allnutt, 2008; Prosser & Burke, 2008). Thus, following the lead of many current researchers (Fine, 2005; Joyappa & Martin, 1996; Pillow, 2002; Lather, 1996), this study was intended to reposition the participants as not just “incidental to the curiosity of the researcher, but (as) masters (or mistresses) into the underlying causes of the events in their world” (Freire, 1982 in Fine, 2005). I was seeking to find patterns and connections across their experiences, without erasing differences and complexity (Creswell, 2007).

As with traditional focus groups, my goal was to be able to develop a snapshot of some of the areas of consensus of a small group of girls, as well as points of contrast and tension and some of the individual perspectives (Kitzinger, 1994, in Barbour, 130). Critics of focus groups point out that they can tend to overemphasize group consensus (Sim, 1998 in Barbour, p. 129) and may mask important contrasting ideas and perspectives in the push for group identity (Waterton & Wyne, 1999). In some cases scholars recommend that participants may tell stories to confirm the communal identity of the group and may sometimes actively avoid conflict, or at least not present experiences that depart from those of the larger group (Munday, 2006 in Barbour, 2007, p. 167). In order to respond to some of
the challenges of working with focus groups, I also included individual interviews and the individual photo presentations. Furthermore, as (Barbour, 2007, p. 136) suggests, I actively sought the participation of girls from very different backgrounds in order to provide opportunities for a range of contrasting perspectives.

**Group Process**

I really enjoyed getting to be with a group of like-minded girls that I could just talk frankly and bluntly with. I loved learning new things about everyone and people everywhere, and learning that the things I worried about could be talked about and people were willing to do something about it. I really enjoyed how we could do all this through photography as well, and see that those photos could represent all the things we wanted to talk about. I thought it was really neat how the photography helped to really get things out and start conversations that we may have not known how to start previously. (Jane)

Prior to beginning the project, two girls had known each other from their participation in the BIAAG program. Other than that, the rest of the girls had never met. I was concerned that this group of girls might not relate as well as the girls who had been working together for the past year with the GSB, especially when we started to discuss more personal and potentially controversial topics. However, over the course of the project, they developed a high level of trust and friendship and a sense of camaraderie through the process. Although I was the “facilitator”, the girls spoke up, listened actively and respectfully to each other. They asked each other follow up questions, asked for clarifications and made comments, either building on someone’s comments or contrasting each others’ stories. Occasionally, they would also challenge each other’s thinking by posing questions or sharing their own experience that might be different from each other.

In the end, seven girls out of the initial 15 GSB members were able to participate in the photovoice project. This process included ten meetings that began with planning and relationship-building activities and culminated in a public photo exhibit that was held in the library of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto in June 2011. Each individual meeting lasted between four to six hours, depending on how energetic the group was and how many unplanned conversations emerged out of the photo
presentations. When each girl was presenting her photos to the group, they often asked questions or made comments related to the topics. Even though the process was not designed as a focus group per se, it did sometimes take on the dynamics of one, where one individual’s comments and photos would stimulate an animated discussion, where girls would share their own experiences that either build on each other’s comments or illustrate a contrasting story.

The entire group was physically present at OISE during most meetings, although occasionally the girls had to leave early or join the meeting through a video chat program. Each meeting followed a similar general process, described in the following section.

**Photovoice Meetings**

1. *Warm-up* - Each meeting usually began by reviewing the schedule for the day and asking for any suggestions or changes. Then, the girls brought up any activities, events or things in their lives that they wanted to share. This discussion was often a sharing of accomplishments, events, performances or problems that they wanted to discuss with the group.

2. *Ice-Breaker* - We usually began by doing an ice-breaker activity to help the participants get to know each other a bit more personally before sharing photos.

   Table Topics – We had a few minutes of “table topics” where the girls brought in articles, photos or issues they had seen since the past meeting that they wanted to discuss with the group.

3. *Write Reflections* - I usually gave the girls a few minutes to individually go through their pictures and write any captions or reflections on their pictures, explain why they chose that photo and how it related to the themes we were discussing.

4. *Photo sharing* - Each girl showed us their photos and explained the meaning of the photos.

5. *Discussion and Analysis* - Throughout the meeting, I asked the girls to take notes and try to identify any common themes they were hearing across everyone’s photos as well as any particularly unique or different ideas or perspectives that were brought up. At the end of the meeting, I asked the girls to sort all the photos into piles and then describe the theme in writing.
Rationale for Photovoice Thematic Meetings

Researchers who have used photovoice have structured their inquiry processes in different ways, building on general themes (women’s lives in rural China), a particular kind of experience (traumatic brain injury), or a needs assessment for a particular project. Some, such as Lorenz (2010) left the directions very open-ended, giving participants limited guidance and simply asked them to bring in photos that help illustrate their daily lives. In her 2010 research study, Lorenz asked people in her study to focus on images that helped illustrate their what their daily lives were like living as a survivor of a traumatic brain injury.

Photovoice Process

Meeting #1: Introduction. Project overview and description. Discussion of girls’ personal goals for the project and any specific suggestions for the content or process. Discussion about ethics and consent process. Presentation of examples of other research projects using Photovoice.

Meeting 2: Taking photos – Ethics and composition. Discussion of what it means to take photos in an ethical manner. A professional photographer joined us for part of the meeting and led a discussion about principles of composition and techniques for taking good photos. She showed us examples and presented a photo presentation to discuss composition. I led a discussion where the girls developed guidelines for taking ethical photos and assuring the consent of the people in their photos.

Meeting 3: All About me (Photo meeting). In this first photo meeting, the girls presented the photos they selected to share their own thoughts about their identities, backgrounds, neighbourhoods and anything meaningful to them about how they viewed themselves.

Meeting 4: All About gender (Photo meeting). In the second photo meeting, the girls presented photos about their ideas about gender and any personal experiences they wanted to share related to this theme. What does it mean to you to be female/to be a girl/woman? What
images/actions/activities/ideas do you think of about being female/male? (In your family/home/school/ethnic/cultural community/Canada/globe).

*Meeting 5: All About citizenship (Photo meeting).* This was the third photo meeting where girls presented photos all about their ideas about what it means to be a citizen (of Canada) and more broadly and what activities, actions, behaviours they see as most related to this theme.

*Meeting 6: All About school (Photo meeting).* In this final photo meeting, the girls presented their photos about their school experiences and any connections they saw (or didn’t see) about how their ideas of self/gender/citizenship related to their school experiences. In addition, the girls began to talk about the final exhibit.

*Meeting 7: All About school (Photo meeting).* In this meeting, the girls talked about what they saw as the positives and negatives of their schooling – especially as it related to the curriculum and textbooks they used in their classes.

*Meeting 8 and 9: Planning photo exhibit at the University of Toronto.* In the final two meetings, the girls went through all the photos and the lists of central themes they generated at the end of each photo meeting to select the final photos, comments and statistics they wanted to use in the final exhibit.

*Meeting 10: Final photography exhibit.* This was the culminating activity of the photovoice project, where the girls (with my facilitation) planned and designed a final photo exhibit at the University of Toronto library where they could share their photos and ideas with family, friends, teachers and anyone else they wanted to invite. The audience included a number of other people who they invited, including NGO representatives, a local Member of Parliament and a director of a local foundation who was interested in learning about their work.

After considering many options, I decided that I wanted to provide slightly more structure to the photovoice process, to reflect some of the issues I had found in the literature on girls and citizenship. In the literature review, I identified a significant gap between theoretical and practical work on citizenship in education and the literature on diverse
identities in education, in particular feminist work. In particular, I was interested in some of the divides between the decades of feminist theorizing that pointed out major critiques of models of civic and political participation that continue to dominate much of the formal teaching and learning of citizenship in schools. I wanted to explore the stories and lives of girls from various backgrounds to test out some of these theoretical issues and see what their lives might tell us about these models and theories. I wanted to explore the girls’ ideas about gender and citizenship separately, drawing on the findings from the literature review to see if these theoretical divides existed in their lived experiences as well. The directions for each meeting was still open-ended and subject to change and adaptation, depending on suggestions from the group.

Unexpected Outcomes

Because of the organic nature of our process, there were a number of unexpected occurrences that emerged out of the process, besides the supportive and mutually reinforcing group dynamic.

Figure 5. Photo of one of the posters created from the girls’ images, comments and statistical information displayed at the exhibit, June 2011.
Culminating Activity:
Group Photo Exhibit

We held an exhibit at the library at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto at the conclusion of our photovoice process. It was understood from the beginning of the project that we would organize a public display of their work, which could take many forms and include any art, writing, poetry, music or dance that the girls wanted to share at the event. We discussed the event for weeks, brainstorming what it should look like, which photos, quotes and statistics we should include. In addition, we brainstormed who we should invite to the event to make it most meaningful to the girls, which ended up being mostly family, friends, girls from the GSB at Plan Canada, our Plan Canada contact person and other interested parties. They also invited a politician and the director of a local foundation.

In the final few weeks leading up to the event, we held two or three official meetings to layout the entire exhibit. The girls went over the images and notes from our previous meetings to select the main themes that came out of the photos and conversations and pick the “best photos” to illustrate the themes as well as the ones they felt had the most visual impact. They put aside the idea of including a kind of performance, but Andrea did create a short comic strip to describe what transpired at our photovoice meetings and Mihika wrote a short poem that she read at the end of our exhibit. Finally, I received a text message late one evening from Janice telling me that she had invited a local member of parliament who she had met in Ottawa on her trip with the GSB to speak on International Women’s Day.

Analysis

Reflections and Researcher Reflexivity

One of my reasons for choosing this methodology was to develop a relationship with my participants and to not only help them develop new skills and knowledge in the area of citizenship education and new media, but also a deeper awareness of their own place in society. Many people have written about the positive effects of listening to students, including Glesne (1999), who points out that “by listening to students carefully and seriously,
you give them a sense of importance and specialness”. Since the research overwhelmingly suggests that there is seldom this kind of in-depth examination of gender in formal civic education and the voices of girls are often missing, I believe this process of listening to girls and young women and their citizenship experiences will give them a new sense of purpose and belonging. When conducting a qualitative research study through my work at another woman-focused nongovernmental organization, I became aware of how creating a research space to listen to women was potentially transformative not only for me, but for the participants in my study. It is with these goals in mind that I chose this methodology for this study. My goal for this study is to add the voices of these girls to larger debates and discourses about gender in education and citizenship in Canada. Finally, this study will add to educators and policymakers’ understanding of the complexities that girls and young women face in navigating their citizenship roles in school and more broadly.

**Analysis Process**

As Luttrell (2000) discussed, I too struggled as researcher to develop a methodology “good enough” to capture the infinite complexity of layered discourses and lived experiences of a group of complex young women. In spite of my own concerns about positivist approaches to research, I wanted to “get it right” and develop an analytical framework that would help make sense of our work. I also felt conflicted about how to navigate a central tension in feminist research between focusing on people’s stories and looking for themes across individual narratives. As Bach (1997) and Finney (2007) and many other feminists have suggested, using narrative and life stories of girls and women can serve to counter both the reductionism of traditional methods and the dominant binaries of theorizing about gender (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Davis, 2008, Denis 2008). I decided to try and find a middle ground, providing both individual profiles of each participant and looking for themes across their stories.

There are a myriad of approaches to analyzing and interpreting visual data such as photos (Becker, 1986; Lorenz, 2010; Riessman, 2007; Rose, 2007). Some scholars use a kind of structural analysis, where they compose a narrative of a single case, focusing on making sense out of its structure by examining the component parts to gain insights beyond those
suggested immediately by its images or words (Riessman, 2007). Other researchers use dialogic/performance analysis where the data are constructed out of the dialogic process of a photo elicitation interview. In this approach, the participant and researcher jointly construct a narrative. Still other scholars use thematic analysis, where they develop a kind of case study of one participant analyzing the themes within one person’s images (Lorenz, 2010).

The focus of my study was on the perspectives and experiences of these seven girls, therefore my analysis process foregrounded the stories, words and images selected by these girls. Founded on the idea that my participants are indeed experts on their own lives, I took their observations and the meanings they attributed to their images as the primary interpretations of their images and provided some context as to why the girls selected these choices. To this end, I drew on both thematic (Riessman, 2007) and dialogic analysis (Williams, 1984) for the profiles in this chapter. I began with an analysis of a single individual case, examining central themes across our meetings, my one-on-one interviews and the approximately 45 photos that each individual shared. Instead of addressing my own reaction to their chosen images, which some scholars also use in their work (Lorenz, 2010; Rose, 2007), I highlighted their own reflections and meanings that they attributed to their images. Finally, I drew on dialogic analysis by interspersing my own reactions and impressions of the girls throughout the analysis. Moreover, I made transparent some of the girls’ suggestions and comments and included an analysis of how I, as researcher, and the group dynamic might have influenced the inquiry process (Mischler, 1999). Finally, the initial draft of the profile was shared with the participants and I met with them individually to give them the opportunity to comment to the draft and ensure that they felt it accurately represented them and their views. I conducted my analysis process in four major phases, which I will detail in the following section.

Girls analyzed photos and sorted them into main themes. They identified convergences and contradictions (common themes and unique stories).

First-Read – I read through interviews, photos and meeting transcripts to generate “impression” of the individual, their likes, meta-statements, language they use to describe themselves, general impression of their ideas about gender/citizenship/school. This analysis led to the individual brief narrative
profiles, including some photos to illustrate most central aspects of the individual girl.

Second-Read – I consolidated the data, which was organized into a variety of summary charts, all the while noting common themes across the sub-thematic meetings.

Third-Read – I read across to examine what was missing, how ideas of gender/citizenship were in contrast.

Then, I engaged with the participants to reflect upon their own experiences of citizenship learning in schools and have them analyze and reflect upon the key messages they received about being a “citizen” and appropriate “civic participation, as defined through their schooling process. I also asked them to reflect upon how their own gendered, racialized and multiple identities connect to or are different from what they learned about their identity as a “citizen” and how they enact their learning in their regular lives (or how they can’t/won’t).

**Challenges of Research Process**

While the process of photovoice was incredibly rich, enjoyable and fruitful from a research perspective, it did present a number of challenges, including most importantly: retention and scheduling. I deliberately selected photovoice because of its promise of spending a prolonged period of time (six hours per meeting every two-three weeks over the course of ten months) with participants in a small group. This lengthy process was designed to help them build a sense of community and develop a comfort level sharing personal details with each other and with me. However, it soon became clear that this choice of inquiry process presented challenges with time.

Initially, the GSB at Plan had about 15 girls, from age 14 to 18, all of whom who expressed interest in participating in the project. In the end, seven of the original members were able to join the project. Several girls could not participate because they were involved with other activities and clubs at their school or university. Another girl withdrew because she cared for her younger siblings in the home and could not attend our meetings on the weekends. Challenges with scheduling remained a consistent issue throughout the year. It
was indeed difficult to have all seven participants able to stay for the entire meeting every time we met. We constantly had to be flexible with scheduling and used video-chat, social media sites and phones in order to include people in as many meetings as we could. It was important to me that all participants were able to hear each other’s analyses and photos and be as flexible as possible, without losing the quality of the interaction. It is a major consideration for those researchers interested in using this approach for data collection.

**Considering Questions of Reliability and Trustworthiness**

When considering qualitative research, researchers are expected to consider such issues as the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the data, designed to illustrate that the data are grounded in reality and not a simple fabrication of one single participant. In particular, research based on collaborative, feminist principles, such as this study, poses unique challenges when considering these kinds of concepts. How can we assume that the experiences, ideas and stories that the girls share are truthful and grounded in reality, not biased by the theoretical framing of the study or the relationship with the researcher?

Following the lead of such feminist researchers as Lather (1986), Bach (1998) and Luttrell (2000), I will explain how I have considered the trustworthiness of the data I collected using four main principles: (a) triangulation or multiple methods: As I described earlier in this chapter, I used multiple data collection methods, including interviews, photovoice and group discussion and looked across all the various data sources to look for patterns and common themes. (b) reflexivity: Throughout the thesis, I have explicitly shared my own reflexivity and my reactions about the process in order to make transparent my own position in relationship to the work; and (c) member checks: Throughout the process, I solicited feedback from the participants and also had them read over their own descriptions and profiles in order to ensure that the descriptions were accurate and that they did not object to anything. Following Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) notion of relational responsibility, this on-going communication and feedback not only ensured trustworthy data, but also positive and productive relationships with the participants. (d) thick description: In this thesis, I included detailed descriptions and various forms of data, from the individual
profiles, to the participants’ analyses in detail and my own analysis, all of which provided a rich and detailed account of the process and the participants.

There is a growing body of literature critiquing positivist research for its inadequacy at capturing the diversity, complexity and contradictions of human society and experiences (Bernstein 1976; Giroux, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Lather, 1986, 2004; Pillow, 2002). As this paradigm proves increasingly problematic, new approaches are necessary to reenvision the research process (Lather, 1986, p. 63). “I don’t believe we can eliminate tensions, contradictions or power imbalances, but I do believe we can (and should) name them. I like the way feminist researchers Natasha Mather and Andrea Doucet (1997) put it: ‘The best we can do is to trace and document our reflexive processes and the choices and decisions we make, not just in general terms, so that other researchers and interested parties can see for themselves some of what has been lost and some of what has been gained. (p. 138)” (Lutrell, 2000, p. 500).

I developed this methodological approach deliberately because it was collaborative, creative and critical (Gallagher, 2008) and because I was concerned both with the findings of the study as well as the girls’ experiences while participating in it. Indeed, this approach is unique, time-intensive and requires a lengthy period as well as a group of participants who are able to meet together regularly over a long period of time. This approach did have many benefits beyond the amazingly rich, in depth discussions and findings that came out of the process. By using a visually-informed process, the images provided the participants an easy way to stimulate their thinking and conversations in a group. In addition, using both interviews as well as photovoice provided me ample opportunity to get to know the girls as individuals while simultaneously being able to observe them in a group.

While this approach did provide an excellent means for using relevant and current forms of citizenship expression used by young people (i.e., social media, photographs, group discussions, online blogs), it was not intended to yield results that can be generalized to vast numbers of people. Additionally, it did not fully examine in depth the myriad ways that race and socio-economic status shape girls’ gendered notions of citizenship and participation. While this study perhaps under-examined issues of class, race and geographic location, it did
suggest that more qualitative research is needed in this area to better understand the lives and experiences of racialized minority girls in Canada. In addition, this study focused mostly on urban and semi-urban girls. However, the findings also suggested that the experiences of five participants who lived in more downtown schools had vastly different school experiences than the two girls who lived in the suburban areas of the GTA. While I cannot generalize from this finding, it does suggest that more empirical work needs to be done to further examine the differences from city girls and those living in suburban and rural areas of Canada. Additionally, while the participants in Project Citizen-Girl did discuss issues of sexuality and sexual orientation, none of the girls explicitly identified as gay, bisexual or questioning. Therefore, while they did discuss experiences of homophobia and sexual orientation in their schools and among their friends, it does suggest that more work needs to be done to consider how sexuality and sexual orientation relates to the ways that young people, both boys and girls, learn their places in the society and the political fabric of Canada.

Researcher Reflexivity:

Research Paradigms

As a Master’s student at a prestigious university in the United States, I decided that research was not for me. Learning about correlation analysis and chi-square did not speak to me and I ended up internalizing my negative reactions to it as my own inadequacies instead of seeing new possibilities for envisioning inquiry processes. It felt like the richness and diversity of life and of human society was flattened and deprived of oxygen. Thus, my interest in research was limited and felt disconnected from my life and my work in teaching and community development, until I was introduced to the work of such scholars as Michelle Fine, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Carol Gilligan, Wanda Pillow, Patti Lather, scholars using narrative inquiry such as Jean Clainnin and other qualitative and arts-informed researchers such as Wang and Burris.
I remember a conversation with a friend when I started to conceive of a possible research study that would incorporate my interest in visual media and participatory processes and critical pedagogy. My well-meaning friend has a Ph.D. in Economics told me “that is a nice social justice project, but that is not research”. At the time, unfortunately, I took his comment to heart and let it shake me. This dismissal of my ideas, my epistemological concerns and my experiences must be somewhat similar to what happens to girls and women as they are “schooled” into their roles in citizenship and society. They learn that their own ideas and values and private lives are not relevant to curricula and the learning of citizenship. The lives and experiences of girls and woman are not appropriate subject matter when learning to be a citizen.

Since my goal was to use democratic research methods to deconstruct issues of power and privilege with young women, my position as a Ph.D. candidate and researcher posed some issues related to power and authority that I needed to navigate throughout the process. Furthermore, my identity as a western, White, privileged women may also have created some issues when working with young women of color. As with many other researchers (Bach, 1998; Lather, 1986; Luttrell, 2000; McIntosh, 1986), I was conscious about these differences that age, race, class, education, geography and how they might have shaped our interactions. I was conscious that they might have been reluctant to speak with me, especially about private issues.

Having been born in the Ivory Coast and having spent my entire life living, working and studying in very diverse environments in a variety of countries, my background helped me to relate to these girls. In addition, my 20 years of teaching and working in programs with girls and young people, both in Canada and in other countries, would also help me relate on a personal level to the girls. In addition, I realized that the group dynamic and my relationship with them opened up a space where they might have felt the need to report achievements and accomplishments, fostering a certain amount of competitiveness. On the other hand, the girls showed a great deal of support for each other, encouraged each other and shared information about opportunities with each other that illustrated a positive group dynamic.
Unexpected Outcomes:  
Reflections on Collaborative Research Process

Modifying the traditional research paradigm through a collaborative arts-informed process shows potential and promise for engaging girls and young people in self-reflections as well as connecting their individual perspectives to larger scale, complex social issues and structures of power. In addition, the collaborative and organic inquiry process seemed to show significant *catalytic validity* (Lather, 1986), leading to a range of social action by the research participants that emerged out of our work together, which I will now discuss.

Throughout our work together, the participants often discussed how they felt that they were different from their peers and other students in their schools because of their interest in gender equality and social justice. Our project created a space for them to share their opinions and experiences with each other. Over time, this experience created a sense of group identity and belonging that was built around this sense of uniqueness – “feeling unique together”.

An articulate and somewhat soft spoken young women with glasses, Priya may not appear the most obvious activist girl, but she shared how her interest made her unique among her high school peers: “I always talked about human rights in high school. But there were no avenue to explore it. I always talk about it with my friends and they think I am nuts”. Mihika also talked about how her passion for equity issues and her desire to speak out differentiated her from a lot of her peers. A surprisingly outspoken 14-year-old, Mihika was more vocal than other students in her classes.

A lot of the Grade 9 students are afraid to voice their opinion. But if there’s anything that I think is wrong, I will speak up and say this needs to be changed. They’re not like that. I get involved and I do a lot of events. When I do stuff with environmental club, people are always shocked that I’m in Grade 9 because I’m always there with Grade 12 students.

Jane also described how her interest in local and global issues of justice started very early in her life and was influenced by her upbringing. As the only White girl of European background, she was the only participant who did not have close family connections to other countries.
I don't know, I've always been pretty sensitive, I'd say, to that stuff. I was definitely raised to be aware of that. I was by no means sheltered or anything...I kind of want to stir the pot and look at the more controversial things. And I don't know if people are more afraid of that but that is normally what gets me going and what gets me talking and sharing an opinion and trying to persuade other people to actually believe these things.

These comments were typical of the girls’ comments in this group, many of whom showed an early curiosity about other cultures and countries as well as a strong belief in justice and the equality of all people around the globe.

The use of a collaborative research process obviously served to build on the inherent proclivities of the participants in my study and also to develop a strong sense of collective identity. Michelle, a somewhat shy girl of Jamaican origins talked about her experiences of going to a mostly White middle class school in the suburbs, it seemed to galvanize the other participants. She talked about a mural in her school that she described as racist, the other girls in the group reacted very strongly, encouraging her to speak up in school and raise her concerns with the school administration. This kind of mutual support and encouragement became a common part of our group meetings. Furthermore, their participation in the collaborative group methods also seemed to have a significant impact on the girls and their sense of self as citizens, activists and leaders. Mihika described the group in this way:

We’re very similar to one another. We all have strong beliefs. We’re very different from other girls our age. Over here we feel like we’re normal, but when I’m in school and I’m talking about feminism or things around the world. People just don’t care, or [they say] oh my god, you’re the feminist chick.

As a conclusion to the project, I had the participants write written reflections on what they had learned and what they had achieved in this process. Their answers revealed a variety of motivations for joining the study, from “seeing issues that need to be addressed in my community”, “wanting to analyze my role in society” and “needing an outlet for my voice”. Priya, a first year university student, talked about some of the tensions arising between her and her mother, who had moved to Canada before Priya was born. She lived with her
younger sister and mother, who had several jobs and told Priya she was expected to get married by the age of 25. Priya admitted to: “needing an outlet to discuss the issues that plague me as a woman in Canada. I wanted to voice my opinions on the barriers that are imposed on females, an issue no one I knew seemed to care about.” The girls talked about the rarity of similar spaces where a group of young women can get together, provide support for each other, validate their perspectives and share time to critically reflect on their lives as young, female citizens.

In every meeting, the girls were able to speak about difficult issues they faced in their families, schools and communities and help each other navigate them, providing advice and support about the complex web of messages they received as young female citizens. As Janice aptly described it:

If anybody join us for the updating session, he/she wouldn’t believe how incredible the other girls! For every updating session, there was always something amazing that was going on in these girls’ lives. For example, the Ottawa conference, Mexico, New Orleans, France, Bali, Skyworks, the Miss G project, TDCSB workshop and the lists goes on. In just 2 short weeks there was always one girl that did something amazing after each meeting. From this, I saw how motivated Project Citizen-Girls are. I have to say, the other girls accomplished so much within these 5-6 months of meetings and you can’t find that in just any high school student. I feel like the updating session is a mini-celebration of the achievements within 2 short weeks.

Thus, the research process not only provided a space for sharing photographs and problems at school, but the act of listening to each other’s successes, accomplishments and concerns acted as a sort of celebration of these girls and their lives, celebrating their roles as active citizens. Over the course of the study, the girls began to develop trust, rapport and a strong sense of group identity, even calling themselves as the “Citizen-girls” and referring to the study as “Project Citizen-Girl”. Near the end of our work, one participant created a Facebook page for the group to keep in touch, share videos and continue to collaborate after the official data collection process was completed. Similar to other research that has used photovoice, the process appeared to affect the girls’ overall confidence (Virgi & Mitchell, 2011, p. 52). They were able to build social competency, reaffirm their own strengths and
develop their understanding and knowledge of gender equality in Canada (Virgi & Mitchell, 2011).

Research methodologies that use collaborative practices, such as photovoice are being adopted more frequently to devise more democratic approaches to scholarly inquiry, build closer and more authentic relationships with communities in a range of different disciplines. Fields as wide ranging as anthropology, sociology and public health are adopting photovoice and other participatory visual methodologies to conduct needs assessment (Wang, 1998), analyze public health issues (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2009), and examine the experience of dealing with medical conditions, such as traumatic brain injury (Lorenz, 2010). This growing use of such methods is perhaps a testament to their success in not only gleaning important findings, but also reenvisioning the research process and developing more collaborative relationships between researcher and participant.

I was continuously struck by the energy, enthusiasm and engagement of the participants. The process seemed to bolster their sense of initiative and also led them to discuss and envision future goals and opportunities. During one of our conversations, Janice shared an opportunity she had found to attend a girls’ leadership summit in Washington D.C. and encouraged other girls to apply. Two girls ended up attending the summit, which introduced them to a number of congresswomen, senators, ambassadors and other prominent women. Michelle, although shy and reserved at the beginning of our work together, followed our study by successfully applying to become a youth researcher in another study looking at civic engagement, initiated by another university.

Another girl, Jane, spent the summer volunteering with an NGO in Kenya, while Priya decided to change her university major from life science to anthropology and equity studies. Finally, the girls who participated in Project Citizen-Girl also became a group of advocates, accompanying me to present at a variety of workshops and presentations at conferences, teacher events and teacher education courses. While it is difficult to attribute this activism directly to their participation in the research, it is apparent that the space created by the collaboration of a group of highly curious and critically minded young women impacted the lives of both the participants and researcher in a profound way.
Chapter 4
Participant Profiles:
Putting Girls in the Picture

Figure 6. I think [the girls in the Girls’ Speakers Bureau] are all so inspirational because they have done so much in life and they are so intelligent, and articulate and really cool…I’m just inspired by really anyone who understands that they are female and gets over it, tries to make a difference, and not just for themselves, but for others as well. (Mihika)

Introduction

In the stories that make up official curricula in schools in Canada and indeed the world, girls and young women are seldom to be found. The construction of a nation’s history and society is still predominantly his-story, that is: a tale of wars, treaties and a line of mostly White male leaders and their actions within the public sphere of society. Citizenship and civic participation are most often described in ways that promise universal access to all citizens, but ignore how citizenship is shaped by hierarchies of gender, race, class, culture and geography, thus relegating the lives of girls and women to outside of schooling (Finney, 2007; Lister, 2003; Pateman, 1988; Preece, 2002). What happens if we uncover these stories and make them central to our construction of society and its history? What can their
experiences tell us about the dominant conceptualization of the citizen and the way we understand and teach about civic participation?

The young women in this project understand that their identities are complex, relational, embodied, situational and even filled with paradoxes. They recognize that they sometimes have power and agency while also being positioned in certain ways that complicate their sense of self and their ideas about gender and citizenship. In this chapter, I will present brief profiles of the seven girls who participated in my thesis study, which came to be known as Project Citizen-Girl. I will not provide analysis in this chapter, but will return later to many of the photos, interviews and the emerging themes later in the discussion chapter. While there are significant similarities between their experiences as citizen-girls in Canada, these profiles are designed to provide a brief snapshot of how each girl conceptualizes herself and includes a brief introduction to her family, ethnic or cultural background, her school, and her local community. One interesting aspect that emerged from their profiles was the fact that several of them expressed a certain wistfulness and nostalgia about getting older and becoming adults. It seems that several of them may have experienced circumstances in their lives (i.e: parents’ divorces, moves, immigration to Canada) all of which seemed to change them and force them to have to take on adult problems at a relatively young age.

These profiles also shed light on how their families have influenced their ideas about gender and civic engagement and their motivation for becoming active citizens. In addition, the descriptions provide some insight into the kinds of messages the girls receive from their families about their roles as females both within the private space of the home and outside the home as citizens of Canada. These brief narratives also suggest how some of the girls’ developed an interest in activism and resisting dominant messages as well as their motivation for getting involved in public issues, and in particular the Girls’ Speakers Bureau (GSB) at Plan Canada.

As we can see from their stories, their forms of civic engagement range from more locally-based service and volunteer work (e.g.: helping in a seniors’ home in their neighbourhood), to more critically-informed advocacy work on national or global issues,
such as speaking on behalf of Plan Canada’s campaign for girls’ rights globally. In addition, their ideas about gender and citizenship also range from being straightforward presentations of how gender roles are conceptualized currently, to complex definitions that involve more developed, explicit critiques of societal norms of gender, race, sexuality and citizenship, such as attending a feminist protest such as Slutwalk or Bust-making.

I drew from my own experience as a classroom teacher, adult educator and developer of girls’ programs, drawing on theories of critical, constructivist pedagogy (Freire, 1996; Weiler, 1988). I acknowledge that to a large degree, I set the framework for this research by selecting the general themes for our meetings and the parameters for analysis. However, any understanding or knowledge that emerged from the study came out of my interaction with these seven young women. In such brief descriptions, it is difficult to explore these girls lives in depth, but the individual stories of these various girls illustrate how their experiences of being girl-citizens have been shaped in complex ways by their race, religion, cultural identity, family, mass media, and school experiences (Finney, 2007). In addition, as Hall (1997) and others have theorized, these young women thought of their own identities as fluid, not fixed and experienced through their diasporic and transnational communities. My inquiry process is grounded in the idea that research is a relational process and was influenced heavily by the group dynamic, it is important to make transparent how it shaped the substance of the conversations the girls’ choices of what to share (Bach, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Finally, I have interwoven my own reflections about how the girls related to each other, to me and to the larger process.

Outline of Participant Profiles

1. Name and description of participant
2. Participant’s relationship to group and to me

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4 Slutwalk is a now international movement that began in Toronto in 2011. It is meant to rally against any justification of rape or violence against women by referring to a woman’s clothing or appearance. Bust-casting is an activity organized by the Women's Centre at Waterloo University – designed to encourage women of all shapes and sizes to be proud of their bodies. The event also encouraged the participation of transgendered women.
3. Participant’s description of self, family and cultural background

4. Participant’s ideas about gender expectations, relationships

5. Participant’s ideas about citizenship civic participation

6. Participant’s enactment of citizenship and civic activities

Figure 7. Knowledge is my priority and my education. My glasses I feel like they are my perception of the world. (Andrea, age 18)

Participant Profile:
Andrea Chang

Andrea was one of the most extroverted and outgoing of the group and had been participating in the Girls Speakers Bureau for approximately a year before the other girls joined the group to begin our work together. Despite their four-year age difference, Andrea and Mihika were very close and spoke simultaneously, finishing each other’s sentences and using shorthand and language that was understandable to only them. They sometimes interrupted the other girls, giggling uncontrollably. However, they also participated actively in our meetings, asked a lot of questions and provided support and encouragement to the other girls.
I was impressed with Andrea’s ability to articulate her perspectives and her seeming fearlessness in expressing views that differed from the group and gently questioning other girls when she wanted to draw a distinction between her opinion and that of other girls. She was also one girl who consistently asked questions of the other girls and was seriously committed to our work, spending long hours with a couple of the other girls to organize our photo exhibit.

During our work together, Andrea was an 18-year old high school student at the B.T. Academy in Scarborough, an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse area in the east end of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Fast-talking and articulate, Andrea was a very busy young woman. In the year we worked together, she was finishing her final year of high school, volunteering with Plan Canada’s GSB, playing bassoon in her school band and applying for a competitive science program at McGill University. When asked about her community, she described it as somewhat multicultural, though “predominantly Caucasian” and on the border between a “really nice neighborhood and a really bad one”, where there is a significant amount of gang activity and shooting.

An only child, Andrea and her parents moved from China when she was eight years old because they “wanted (her) to have a better life. It was difficult at first because we didn't have any money when we came. All we could do was start working right away”. Her father used to be an electrician in China, while in Canada he runs a convenience store and her mother works at Tim Horton’s, a chain of popular and inexpensive coffee stores. It was clear from Andrea’s descriptions of her parents that she was keenly aware of their sacrifices for her and has developed a strong desire to be successful to ensure that her parents’ move and subsequent difficulties were not in vain. Her sense of citizenship and her personal ambition in part comes out of her respect for her parents and a deep sense of obligation.

As with many teenagers, Andrea’s life was mediated by and through technology. She took a photo of her computer to show her close relationship with her computer. A lover of comics, K-Pop (Korean pop) and online fan-zines, Andrea said: “I do everything on the

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5 The names of the schools were changed for the purposes of this thesis.
computer and the internet is my way of communicating with people. I do all my work here. Essentially it’s like my life”. When asked what she uses it for, she said: “anything and everything. I watch TV, read French, read stories, fan fiction etc”. She does not limit her reading to the internet, however, she is an avid reader and has a strong love of learning. Her greatest goal is to “acquire knowledge” and get a first class education.

Andrea’s photos illustrated how her sense of self and her concepts of gender and citizenship are multilayered and evolving. They show her keen ability to identify inequalities in society, especially traditional gender norms and how they play out in her life, while being able to critique them overtly and defy them. One interesting dimension of Andrea’s photos was a strong questioning of societal values, such as the emphasis placed on physical appearance, shopping, makeup and consumption. In this way, perhaps Andrea stands apart from many teenage girls her age who are more preoccupied with their appearance and who are avid consumers of mainstream media. In our group conversations, the girls talked frequently about television shows that were very popular among their friends and other girls their age, such as: Toddlers and Tiaras and The Jersey Shore. Andrea differed a bit from the other girls in her open distaste for such programs.

Perhaps like some of the other girls whose parents immigrated to Canada, Andrea’s interest in social activism seems strongly rooted in the fact that she has lived in both China and Canada and aware that her life in Canada is different from her parents’ lives in their China. In addition, she recognizes that life is different for men and women and she joined the GSB out of a desire to address this inequality and have the opportunity to speak out against it. When asked about her opinion of women doing all the housework, Andrea vociferously complained about this gendered arrangement. However, she admits that her own role in her parent’s house is currently limited. “I feel really bad for saying this, but it's usually my mother who does a lot of the chores. Like, my dad does try to help out from time to time but usually, like, because my mom wakes up the earliest for work and … if she has to cook for herself, she might as well cook for her family.” She goes on to talk about how her parents, and in particular her mother, consistently reaffirm their expectations of her within the home context. She gives an example of how her mother frequently reminds her to be clean and to take greater care of her appearance because she is a girl.
I don’t see why our role is in the home…and we have to be responsible for the cooking and the cleaning and at the same time…everybody needs food and everyone has to learn to take care of themselves. I don’t know why it’s supposed to be a woman who does that. It’s just really stupid. I mean for a guy, what if he doesn’t get married, he can’t just eat cup of noodles every night.

Andrea’s photos were more overtly critical of traditional gender norms than some of the other girls. Unlike other girls whose photos were a straightforward representation of their ideas about gender differences, her photos reflected a more pronounced difference between what was expected of her and what she believed those expectations should be. A girl who described her heroine as Marie Curie and who is determined to become a scientist, Andrea’s parents were concerned about her wanting to go into the sciences because they worried that it would be harder for her to be successful as a female and that her accomplishments in the sciences may not have been recognized.

Andrea herself expressed her frustration at how women’s lives and contributions to society are too often overlooked and undervalued. One of the most powerful images and comments of the entire project was Andrea’s blurry photo of a lone tree next to a country road.

To me, I think women are kind of like trees, because in the environment and ecology, trees [are] the center and the home for everything. That’s where everything is interconnected and based on the trees. They are the home, a source of food, shelter, everything. Just like trees now, they are being overused and overlooked in today’s society. I think women are like that too. Women are so central to society but people are just overusing them and overlooking them and ignoring them.

In a sense, this image raised very clearly one of the central feminist critiques of traditional notions of citizenship, the divide between gender roles in the private and public spheres, a theme that I discussed in the literature review and to which I will later.

More than any other girl, Andrea’s photos seemed to clearly identify some of the barriers that prevent women’s full participation in society. She included other photos from
the ancient, walled city of Carcasonne in France, which she visited on a school trip during the year of our research. Obviously impressed with the city, she used images of the walls and gates to highlight the restrictions on women as well as the many measures women need to take to “fit into” society’s expectations of them. By this, she is referring to the need for women to conform to traditional feminine roles and expectations. Andrea followed this by including a photo of some very large rocky cliffs in order to underscore how despite society’s continued lack of recognition of women’s contributions, women have a great reserve of strength and endurance below the surface, highlighting her hopefulness for herself and the future.

Andrea’s concept of Canadian identity and citizenship has been developed out of her multidimensional identity and her experience as an immigrant that has lived in two different countries. She resisted the tendency to oversimplify identity. Like the other girls, Andrea found it hard to define what values and aspects are uniquely Canadian without talking about its geography and without situating it in relationship to the U.S. and other countries. She described in detail the many opportunities she has been given in her life in Toronto, including access to a good education, free access to information (one of her photos was of her library card and her government issued ID), participation in the political system through voting and a variety of possibilities to get involved her school and wider community. “There are many opportunities in this country. It’s kind of weird, because in China, you have to pay to use the public libraries. Here, it was so important to take advantage of the opportunities and give back and go into these public places and be part of the public.”

“I don’t like to be classified in a box. As a person, I am a mix of different cultures, I am Chinese and Canadian.” Her ‘self’ was also mirrored in her sense of Canadian identity. “I just want to show that as Canadians, we’re not so one-dimensional. We have multiculturalism and as a global citizen, we have to be accepting of other cultures. I don’t want to label myself as just Canadian, I (have) many different identities and as a citizen, you shouldn’t just be limiting yourself to just one thing, you should be accepting of all cultures and ethnicities etc.”
One of her first pictures to describe herself was a globe, which she selected to show how the world was both small and very large at the same time. Another photo in a similar vein was of a fork crossed over a chopstick (see Figure 9). Thus, she situates herself and her notion of Canadian citizenship in a multicultural, transnational, global context.

In addition to situating Canada’s identity in relation to China’s, Andrea describes citizenship and civic engagement as a “two-way street”, encompassing both rights and responsibilities, but clearly emphasizes what individual citizens can do to make the country more inclusive and improve the quality of life for people. As with the other girls in the study, Andrea places great importance on volunteering as a way to get involved and show one’s
citizenship. “I think volunteering is very important to give back. As Canadians, we have a lot of stuff that was given to us. I think it’s really important that you’re not just taking things from Canada, it’s a two-way street, that you’re also giving back to your community.” In her view, citizenship includes a wide range of activities beyond “thin” citizenship, beyond voting and recycling, to include activism, advocacy and social justice work.

A self-described environmentalist and lover of nature (similarly to Jane, Priya), Andrea shared one image of a Japanese fighting star, called a “shorikin” for our discussion of citizenship. “I know this seems random”, she says unselfconsciously, but “I wanted to show as a citizen, you often find yourself fighting for your country, and sometimes you need to fight against your country, (to) fight about what you’re passionate about, to fight against the government and lobby”. In particular, Andrea included several photos symbolizing her passion to fight against sexism, homophobia and environmental pollution. Her concept of citizenship also recognized equality and the privileges of citizenship are not granted immediately but may require that people advocate for greater rights. Perhaps because she is one of the older girls, she seems to have a more complex definition of civic engagement, which includes both ideas of inclusion and belonging as well as social critique and social transformation. After Project Citizen-Girl ended, Andrea left to do her Bachelor’s degree in Chemistry and Physics at McGill University.

Participant Profile:

Janice Wong

I was always told by my parents, teachers, classmates and other people I’ve encountered in my life that I should help the world in any way possible. So I joined all charitable clubs in my school up until high school. To list a few, there was; Jump Rope for Hearts, Free the Children, Scott Mission, Canadian Cancer Society and of course Because I am a Girl. I stopped participating in these clubs in high school. Due to the lack of spirit in my high school, I decided that I needed to look for opportunities myself outside of school. It was different from the others because it was not solely fundraising even though that is very important too. Through BIAAG and Citizen Girl, I truly feel like I can make a difference in this world and that people care about what I have to say! (Janice)
Figure 10. Janice’s image of fellow students painting Olympics mural at school.

Janice was an active and consistent member of the group, attending all meetings, never leaving early and volunteering to compile a list of quotes, statistics and facts for our photo exhibit. Always willing to volunteer for speaking engagements and to take on tasks, Janice showed initiative and drive. Over the course of the year of data collection, Janice asked me numerous questions about my previous professional and educational experiences. In particular, Janice was interested in learning about my time as a graduate student, because she admitted it was her dream to go to a very competitive Ivy League university. When we were planning the final photo exhibit, Janice suggested inviting several local Members of Parliament to the event. I encouraged the girls’ suggestions, but secretly thought the MPs would not attend. One evening I received a text message from Janice announcing that she had invited a local Member of Parliament to the event. She was not intimidated by the position or authority of this MP and showed confidence in her own work and the value of the citizen-girl project. In the end, the MP did in fact attend our exhibit and took photos with all the girls, sharing it with her Twitter feed and Facebook page.

At the beginning of the study, Janice was in Grade 10 at Queen Lawn Collegiate in the West end of Toronto. Janice is relatively soft-spoken and her braces and young looking face belie her maturity and lofty goals. She lives in a house with her parents and her older brother, who she said might be a bit “sexist” because he likes to make sexist jokes around
her. She lives in a predominantly “Asian and Italian” suburb on the outskirts of the downtown area of Toronto near a well-known shopping mall called Pacific Mall, or P-mall, by the girls, where Janice admits to spending time with friends “almost every day”. “I’m really involved in my community,” said Janice, followed by a list of volunteer work and activities which included working in a youth group at a seniors’ home, playing violin, swimming, and planting trees with a local NGO. A fiercely ambitious 15-year old, she talked frequently about her future goals, such as going to Harvard University and running for office. Because of her curiosity (and that of the other girls), we spent many hours discussing what the girls wanted to do in the future. Another “busy girl”, Janice joined the GSB mostly in order to get some volunteer hours to help her get into the International Baccalaureate program at her school.

The Wong family is originally from the island of Hainan in southern China and moved to Toronto when Janice was six or seven and entered Grade one. She describes her parents as supportive. She has many family members in Canada and China and her father still travels back and forth. A businessman, “basically, he’s gone for half the year. He goes back for two months and then he’s back (in Toronto) for two months.” In Janice’s family, there are clearly defined gender roles and expectations especially within the home. For example, Janice calls her mother, who works as a nurse, as the “key member of my family…being Chinese and having that culture, everyone depends on my mom, even though it’s not right to make her do all that stuff. My dad sort of let her know that it’s her responsibility, so basically, she …she does all the chores. My mom, is pretty sick!”

Janice, like Andrea and Mihika, expressed some guilt about not doing more to help her mother around the house, calling herself “a bad child”. When asked if she would have a similar arrangement if she ever had a family, she revealed some conflicted feelings, honouring her mother’s significant contributions, but also distancing herself from it by qualifying it with: “I think in the future, there will be a really big difference, women will have their rights and be able to decide what they want to do.” Thus, it seemed that in Janice’s

6 Sick is a slang word used by young people to mean great.
mind, these gendered arrangements are simply “normal” at this time in history and she is not highly critical of them herself. At the beginning, Janice seemed to characterize gender inequality as a problem in the developing world and didn’t immediately connect her work with BIAAG on girls’ rights globally to the gendered expectations and differences in her own life and of women in Canada.

One interest that makes Janice slightly unique is her participation in the Air Cadets program (see Figure 11), which is a quasi-military group that provides young people with scholarships and training in a variety of areas. “The aim of the Cadet Program is to develop in youth the attributes of good citizenship and leadership; promote physical fitness; and stimulate the interest of youth in the sea, land, and air activities of the Canadian Forces.” (Canadian Military Forces, 2012). As with Jane and Mihika, it is obvious from Janice’s commitments that her family is concerned about her extensive volunteer work and wide range of commitments. “They were really frustrated and thought I could use that time for schoolwork and stuff. “

In spite of her parents initial concern, Janice’s consistent participation in the GSB or Citizen-Girl seemed to change their opinion, as well as her own. Janice was chosen to go to Ottawa with Mihika and Andrea to speak at the Canadian Parliament on International Women’s Day as part of Plan Canada’s advocacy work on behalf of girls and women. During the trip, the girls each gave a short speech in front of Members of Parliament, NGO
representatives and the media to advocate for an International Day of the Girl and met with female MPs and the Canadian Federal Minister for the Status of Women.

That was really eye-opening. It was wake-up call – ish. I came to BIAAG for the volunteer hours at first. Then I found out that they weren’t giving volunteer hours. But I thought it was really interesting. Every time I come to a meeting, I’m like wow. It was really fun. Before I went to the Ottawa conference, I didn’t know what to do with my career… but now I think I might go into politics and economics.

Her participation in these events also seemed to affect her parents, who were impressed and encouraged her to continue because it was “special”, calling her family in China to tell them about her visit to Parliament.

In addition to setting high goals, Janice’s photos highlight the importance of relationships with family, friends and others. She sees herself, her ideas of gender and citizenship as relational and interconnected. In her individual photos, she included one about her locker to illustrate how her friends come and sit and talk in front of her locker early in the morning before school, while another image of Chinese bubble tea represented her relationship with a close friend (see Figure 12). “Bubble tea is like a sense of completion because every week my friend and I would go to P-mall and get bubble tea and we would just sit down and talk about our week and give encouragement to each other to help each other get through the next week.” A third photo (see figure at the top of her profile) is of a friend of hers carrying another girl on her back (see figure at top of profile). It is a blurry, impressionistic image, but it created an interesting piece for conversation. Janice describes this photo as highlighting the importance of girls helping girls, a fitting image for our work together and the work of the GSB.
Figure 12. Janice’s bubble tea.

Janice’s ideas about gender focused almost exclusively on traditional ideas of femininity, and less on the relationship between men and women. She also raised society’s over-emphasis on women’s appearance and bodies. She describes women as more emotional, sentimental and maternal than men and included several photographs about beauty image. Janice’s motivation and concept of civic participation was heavily influenced by both her parents’ high goals for her as well as as their gendered expectations of her and her brother.

Interestingly, she seemed to show a strong interest and respect for people in positions of authority and power, such as the female politicians, whom she met on her trip to Ottawa. Perhaps, some of this respect for authority comes not only from her family, but also from her work with the Air Cadets. When talking about the impact of the Cadets program, she describes how it “taught her who to respect”, although she doesn’t expand on this statement in great detail. Over time, Janice’s ideas about gender and citizenship seemed to evolve and she admitted that her participation in this process helped her identify and critique limiting expectations of girls, develop positive relationship with her peers and develop a new sense of confidence in her ability to achieve the goals she has for her life.

I definitely learned that the society is not socially just, but this time in a researcher’s perspective. We analyzed with numbers and facts which sometimes shocked me because I thought Canada would rank among top 5 for women’s justice, but in fact, it is 27th!!!!! About myself would be that… I don’t want to go into the math and sciences anymore. As of now, politics and human rights are what I am really interested in. I achieved happiness and
stress-relief when I attended meetings because I got to work with girls who share the same passion for human rights. Most importantly, I want to make this my career!

Janice’s notion of citizenship and citizen participation is multifaceted, highlighting elements of “thin” citizenship such as voting and flags (patriotism), as well as sharing images that celebrate her own activism and the contributions of her friends and GSB peers while they represented girls’ rights in Ottawa at Parliament. In addition, she also raised the importance of being a caring, collaborative individual who not only contributes to family and community, but also takes care of animals and the environment as well. Interestingly, while she is someone who shows explicit respect for authority and traditional structures, she is one of the only girls who chose a picture that highlights the relationship between women’s traditional role in the home and the modern woman in the workplace. I will return to these themes in the discussion chapter.

**Participant Profile:**

**Jane Smith**

I don’t ever not like to be doing something. If I’m going to be doing something, I like to do something bold. I always seem to be the one who likes to stir the pot [at school]. At home, my parents always assume I’m going to follow the rules. (Jane)

*Figure 13. Jane’s feet while hanging on zipline.*
When I first met Jane, I wasn’t sure she would fit the criteria for my study. In particular, she was the only White girl of European background, didn’t go to a public school and was not a new Canadian. After our first meeting, I thought including her would provide a richer, broader conversation and a more diverse set of perspectives and experiences for our group process. While Jane was presenting her initial photos about herself and her family, I found myself relating very easily to her sense of adventure and desire to travel and experience difference cultures and ways of life. In addition, she talked about her love of dance and animals, as well as how she loved to get outside and do adventurous things with her family. I thought that including her would further enrich the discussion and learning within the group, adding more opportunity for integrating a concern for class, race and ethnicity to our group analysis of identity and gender.

During our project, Jane was a 15 year-old girl in Grade 10 at St Patrick’s School, a private Catholic school in the downtown area of Toronto. She is the only participant who does not attend a public school, although not the only girl who attends a Catholic school. She lives in a middle class neighborhood of big old houses and a large green park commonly known as Greektown, although, “there is a good mix of people in my neighborhood.” Jane explained: “my mom’s family is from the UK. they’ve been in Canada for quite a while. So I have a lot of British or Scottish ancestry on that side. Then my dad’s side is from Croatia and my dad’s mom grew up in a little kind of Croatian neighborhood in Montreal.”

After Jane had presented her introductory photos about her own identity, another girl asked her to choose the top three most important photos and she chose a picture of her ballet shoes, one of her feet zip lining (see Figure 13) and a third of her in the Arctic. “(I picked them because) they show what I do.” She went on to say that they show her love of travel and adventure and self-expression, all characterized by action and activity. Jane described her parents as two middle class professionals, who share responsibilities within the home. She said somewhat proudly and with a sly smile on her face: “Newsflash, it is my dad who does most of the cooking”.

A witty girl with a slightly sarcastic sense of humour, Jane’s ideas about identity and citizenship evolved throughout our work together likely because of her interactions and
conversations with a group of girls from racialized minority and immigrant backgrounds whose families did not have the same socioeconomic status or privileges as she had growing up.

As with other girls, Jane’s photos about gender revealed her recognition of differences between men and women, while also recognizing women’s hidden strengths. Like Janice and others, she acknowledges that she still associates cooking and the kitchen central metaphors with being female, along with keepsakes and scrapbooks. In addition, her photos seem to reveal her association of violence and aggression with masculinity. At the same time, she chose images to show some of the ways that she and other girls and women defy traditional expectations of girls. She was slightly annoyed at the common assumption that girls should not be athletic, outdoorsy, and should not get their hands dirty. She said: “I’ve always been the kid who likes to run around and hike and swim in the lake and dance in the rain and its becoming less of a divide between boys and girls doing that”.

![Jane’s ballet shoe collection.](image)

Figure 14. Jane’s ballet shoe collection.

Although her family is not involved in any activities that might be connected to social justice issues or indeed to their family’s cultural heritages (English or Croatian), she described herself as having been raised to be aware and to care about equity issues. In grade four, she lobbied to be able to read a controversial book for class about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, the book was removed because it had been deemed to be too controversial. “And I mean, I'm ten at this point, and I thought, no you can't do that. So I read it and there was a lot
of controversy in the media about it. And I’d say that was the first time I spoke up about anything, because there was an article in the Globe and Mail. And my mom said you should write a letter. So I wrote one in and then they published it, so that was the first time I kind of decided to speak up about anything. I’ve always been concerned with stuff like that.”

Similarly to the other girls, Jane is very active and obviously enjoys being engaged in many activities. Moreover, she also revealed that she was considered to be gifted and changed schools to find teachers to support and challenge her more than her original school. “When I was in grade four to five, I switched schools for a gifted program. Grades four and five were some of my best years at school because I had great teachers. People say, ‘you must be so smart’. It’s not that you’re necessarily smarter, we just think differently. Being in a learning environment (where people) kind of got you was really good. The teachers knew how to teach us.” Not one to pretend false modesties, Jane described how there were people at her school who “have lots of money” and raised huge sums of money for events and issues. She participated in the “community club” at her school, which organized fundraisers for organizations such as Free the Children and the Terry Fox run (an annual event at 100s of schools around the country that raised funds for an organization to fight Cancer). In fact, she volunteered that “for Terry Fox every year, we raised $30,000 because people get their parents to sign cheques”. Even while Jane seemed proud of her school’s fundraising ability, she was also slightly skeptical of the impact it might have and seemed determined to do more.

Interestingly, when asked why she joined BIAAG, Jane gave an answer that was slightly different than the other girls. Most talked about how they had seen a BIAAG ad on television about girls’ rights and how they connected with it. Jane on the other hand, seemed to take a slightly different approach. “The main reason I wanted to join is because I’ve always wanted to do something. I know everyone wants to save the world, but I’ve just never known the right way to get into that and I think that (BIAAG) is definitely a good starting point, because you can sell lemonade but that only goes so far and a group like this actually

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7 One of the recommended and common activities of the Because I’m a Girl clubs that are organized in schools is having a “Pink Lemonade” fundraiser where students are asked to raise money to
has the power to do something.” She recognized the limitations of an approach built exclusively on fundraising and wants to find a way that actually allows her to have the power to make real social change. Jane seems to be excited about being involved in being able to transform people’s ideas about girls and gender through advocacy and education.

A girl who describes herself as “always having an itch to see the world”, Jane has traveled a fair amount with her family. Perhaps in part because of her extensive travel within Canada (she has been in the eastern provinces, the west, and the Arctic and Nunavut), her conceptualization of citizenship in Canada seems slightly different than that of the other girls in her study. Her ideas of what it means to be a citizen of Canada seem grounded in her knowledge of the different regions of the country. More than the other girls, who haven’t traveled across the country, she recognizes how geography has shaped our national identity. She included several images of Canada’s nature, again reinforcing the idea that much of Canada’s identity comes from its geography and vast wilderness. “Being able to see so much of my country is one way I have gotten a sense of pride in my country”. Her idea of Canada’s role in the world is shaped by the idea that those individuals or countries who “have more” have the responsibility to give to those who have less. Despite her recognition of inequality, it seems that in her estimation, the relationship of those who are more fortunate to those who are less is one of “helping”, rather than one characterized by a critique of social structures, likely a result of the way citizenship has been framed in her schooling or family.

In our meetings, Jane was always an active and engaged participant, who seemed comfortable sharing her opinions and her experiences, even if they were occasionally in contrast to the opinions and experiences of the other girls. She also showed a certain sense of humour as she talked about some topics. For example, when a boy in her class questioned why there should be an international woman’s day, she quickly fired back, “why not, every other day is international men’s day.” Jane’s experiences were somewhat different from the other girls for a number of reasons including: race, cultural background, her experience at a support PLAN Canada’s girls’ programs around the world.
private Catholic school and her socioeconomic status. After the project finished, Jane spent part of her summer volunteering with an NGO in Kenya, and only further strengthening her own sense of civic responsibility within a global frame.

Participant Profile:
Mihika Mathuram

A lot of the ninth grade students are afraid to voice their opinion. But if there’s anything that I think is wrong, I will speak up and say this needs to be changed. They’re not like that. I get involved and I do a lot of events.

(Mihika)

Although she was the youngest in the group, Mihika was a consistently active and outspoken participant in the group. She asked many questions to the other girls and offered her thoughts to build on their stories as well. I immediately connected to her enthusiasm and obvious interest in many social and political issues and felt like I could relate to her, despite our differences in age and background. Mihika was more aware than other girls about feminist movements, feminist thinkers, mentioning Eve Ensler and others, and frequently suggesting activities for our group. The first time I met Mihika, I was surprised to learn that she was only 14 years old. A surprisingly selfpossessed Grade 9 student from All Saints
Catholic High School in Scarborough, she seems more mature than her years. I immediately admired her confidence and her ability to articulate her views.

Mihika’s family moved to Canada from Sri Lanka before she was born and she describes herself as fully “assimilated” into Canadian society and having limited knowledge of her parents’ home country and culture. Though Mihika’s parents are Hindu and she describes them as somewhat religious, she described them as being interested in all faith traditions and having a shrine in the house with symbols from various faith traditions. Mihika and Priya both felt different from a lot of the other “brown girls” they went to school with. They both liked North American, English and Tamil TV shows, movies and music. “When I say I differ from most Tamil girls it's usually because (the ones in my school) are in one clique who only speak of boys and small issues that don't seem to interest me. Like I'm obsessed with UK films/shows, poetry and classic rock. So it's weird for them because I'm already a minority and to add on I'm Tamil and most Tamil girls don't grow up listening to that kind of music or anything. That isn't what's "cool" and neither is it "traditional". That's what I mean cause I would most likely love to have conversations about Tamil or Bollywood films and they would normally feel weird and embarrassed. I feel like I always want to stay away from assimilating to the norm, almost like I'm afraid I will, and most of the brown girl cliques like to be the norm. I guess that's just who they are and this is just who I am”.

She lives in a suburban town house with her parents and one of her older sisters. Her mother works several jobs in food service and still does much of the cooking and cleaning around the house.

She basically wakes up at 4:00 and leaves the house. Sometimes she comes back at 3:00 if it’s Tim Horton’s. But if she’s working at KFC as well, then she’d come back around 10:00, 11:00. So she is usually working all day, but then she also has to come home and cook and do everything because she’s

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8 “Brown Girls” is a term used by both Mihika and Priya in our informal conversation to describe the young women whose families come from South Asia, most of whom in their schools are Tamil. The group frequently used the terms: Black, Brown, White instead of referring to someone’s ethnic or cultural background. These are not accepted language in formal, academic circles, but were used frequently by my participants. I chose to keep them in order to stay true to their authentic language.
always been the one to cook. My dad’s a chef, but he’s never cooked dinner in the house.

While her parents may have a more traditional division of labour, Mihika seems to have learned some of her desire for feminist activism from her older sister, who is a student at the University of Waterloo in Religious Studies and Political Science. “She's very different from me but we are also very similar in some ways. We are both strong, outspoken feminists and artistic in different ways. But she is a Hindu and a spiritual person who values Indian culture and I am an agnostic, always trying to learn about Sri Lankan culture and feeling the need to experience it”.

Mihika described herself as a “weird child” because her interest in global social justice issues developed at an early age. “In grade four I was into child labour and child rights. In grade six I got into girls rights. I think I can relate more easily to the issue of girls rights. Not only am I a girl, but I’m young.” She discussed her frustration at trying to get involved with several NGOs, most of who did not respond to her or told her she was too young to join. After many attempts, she was eventually invited to join the GSB. She explained how her many activities and involvements began to get her recognized and in Grade 8, she won a citizenship award, was the valedictorian in her grade and was one of the top 25 girls in math. These successes seemed to validate her interests and her parents started to support her civic engagement more readily.

Mihika’s involvement is indeed broad and varied. She is a member of her school’s debate club, the environmental council at her school and the V-girls book club based on the feminist work of Eve Ensler. Originally, she was interested in the school leadership group but realized they organized dances and social events, while the environmental club was able to do things that had an impact on other people. “That’s the most active council in my school from my perspective, because we deal with issues like water, and not only for Torontonians, but we deal with issues like water in South Korea, North Korea, and what’s happening there, and how we can help. We go to conferences. We actually make a difference, I think, from my perspective.”
In spite of Mihika being the youngest girl in the group, her photos show a broad conceptualization of both gender and citizenship, and reveal a surprising nostalgia, much like Macy, about a lost innocence and the sense that she is wise beyond her years. She included an image of her baby cousin and explained how it symbolized her lost innocence about the world. “I wonder how much fun it would be to go back to the time when I was naive and fragile in my parents’ eyes.”

The photos and comments that Mihika shared with the group reveal her complex idea about gender, and focus mainly on female identity, and less so on the relationship between femininity and masculinity or men and women. Throughout the discussion, she highlighted both the strength of women role models and her admiration for women who defy gender expectations. She included an image of a female Member of Parliament as well as one of a good friend of hers who looks relaxed and confident. “I think every woman, every girl should grow up looking at images of women looking, bold and happy and satisfied and someone who respects themselves. (She) is wearing bright colors and looks really happy and she looks satisfied and happy to be who she is. I think when girls grow up seeing pictures of women like that, they kind of see themselves growing up to be like that and that’s what we need more of.” Additionally, Mihika shared a photograph of a female cousin in the midst of a martial arts competition as a kind of alternative role model for girls. “It’s a girl kicking up really high in my cousin’s Tai Kwon Do class. It shows strength and its’ not really about fighting, it’s more about the strength and the ability. Tai Kwon Do and things like that are really cool, it’s not about fighting but more about self-defense. I wish I could have taken it or boxing. I think it’s important for all girls.”

In addition, several of her images explored society’s overemphasis on women’s bodies and appearance. She discussed the pressures that girls feel to be beautiful, to wear makeup and always look sexy and appealing to men. One particularly striking image is of two phones shaped like headless, women’s bodies with round breasts (see Figure 16).
Figure 16. Image of cell phones shaped like headless women’ bodies.

We saw something really disgusting and we were like: what the hell is this? It turned out to be a phone. It was shaped as a female body and the head was cut off. It made me think about the objectification of women and in society how we are always surrounded by pictures of females looking a certain way. There is no respect towards them and noone sees these images as people, they see them as objects. These norms in society actually have an impact on girls so when we see the images like that, they are seen as a normal telephones that guys will buy and will look at as a cool device. When we see things like that as normal…we see ourselves in a certain way and it’s something that we should fight, but not all of us do.

She included a photograph of two bracelets that she wears regularly that declare her passionate interest in social change and making a difference in her community (see figure at top of profile). Her photos reveal her belief in the idea that the individual citizen has the responsibility to stay informed and educated about real issues, respect religious and cultural diversity and contribute to the multiple communities to which he/she belongs.

This is my cousin, who I regularly tutor two days a week. I took a picture of him while he was studying. One thing that is important is to influence others in a positive way. (When) I know that I’ve had an impact on them is really every time I teach them something and I know they’ve gotten it, when they
look at me and smile, it makes me feel good as a person. I know that I’m actually making a difference in their lives. Having an impact on someone, especially people younger than you is really important.

Her idea of participation is strongly rooted in the responsibility of the individual to improve the lives of others and to be of service. Her comments illustrate the personal gratification she gets from working with young people and having an impact on their lives. In addition, Mihika’s ideas about participation show an interesting mix of service, cultural tolerance and diversity, along with ideas of social resistance and critique, that I will discuss more in depth in the next few findings chapters.

**Participant Profile:**

**Michelle Hyles**

I am sort of on the verge of being a feminist. That is why I was interested in the program “Because I am a Girl.” Some people find the word “feminist” scary. They feel it is associated with being an ultra-activist. But you don’t have to be extreme and go so far you get into trouble. (Michelle)

![Figure 17. Michelle with friends.](image)

When Michelle joined my group of participants, she was brand new to the GSB and had not yet attended a meeting. One evening, I received a phone call from Michelle to express her interest in joining the study. She had exchanged emails with the coordinator of
Plan’s GSB and had learned of my study through Plan. When I met Michelle for the first time, she arrived in the lobby of the Education building at the University of Toronto, where we held our meetings, in a bright pink sweatshirt accompanied by her mother. She was the only girl whose parent came with her to meet me and drove her into the city for our Saturday sessions. She was less talkative than the other girls and stood somewhat apart from them because some of them had known each other for over a year and were more outspoken. It was sometimes difficult to read what Michelle was thinking and feeling about our discussions. The rest of the girls had met several times before we began the project and had already developed trust and a strong rapport.

Michelle joined the project for the first time at our very first photo meeting, unfortunately missing several of the introductory meetings, which likely affected her role in the group. Transportation challenges also probably impacted her participation in the group since she was not always able to come in person and spent time with the group. On several occasions, she had to participate via video-chat, which likely made it more difficult to engage deeply with the other participants. Over time, however, Michelle did seem to gradually become more comfortable, sharing more freely as the group developed. At times, Michelle’s face lit up and she talked openly about certain topics when she had the opportunity to do so, but she never interrupted the other girls and was very polite.

When we began our work together, Michelle was 15 years old. She is a somewhat soft-spoken girl of Jamaican background attending a high school in a Toronto suburb. She lives in a house in a predominantly White suburban neighbourhood with her parents and her twin brother. Michelle is passionate about dance and talked about how it provided a space for her to express herself and feel good. “I think it’s helped me with my stage presence because I am shy when I don’t know or if I don’t know my environment, dance has helped me be more confident in myself. It’s also helped me because you get critiqued by the judges a lot and it helps you handle it better.” Though the other girls in the group sometimes dominated conversation, when given the opportunity to speak about certain topics, Michelle’s face brightened and she talked freely. She loves movies, the Canadian teen drama Degrassi, and admits to watching the hours of television coverage of the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, which occurred on the weekend of one of our Saturday meetings.
Michelle grew up in Vaughn and went to a religious school most of her life that was based on the principles of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Prayers were part of the daily activities at her previous school. She talked at length about her move from this religious school to a secular public school where the population was more culturally and racially diverse. The move seemed to have a significant impact on her life as she mentioned it frequently, sharing several photos that explored this transition in her life. Despite having been born in Canada, Michelle identifies her background as “Jamaican” and included a photo of several t-shirts and items she associates strongly with her Jamaican heritage. She explains how, in her view, part of Canadian citizenship is the freedom people have to retain their ethnic and cultural heritage, which she compared favourably to the U.S., which she believes doesn’t allow people the same freedom.

Michelle described her family as “pretty liberal” and explained how though her mother does most of the cooking and cleaning, her father does help with household chores “once a week”. She and her brother are expected to clean their rooms and occasionally help out with setting the table or cleaning up, but nothing regular. In addition, Michelle’s parents treat her and her brother equally and do not seem to expect radically different things from them because of their gender. “I think my parents have pretty similar expectations. But my mom challenges me more. Like with grades and stuff at school.” Michelle also draws inspiration from her mother and brought in her photo as one of her images related to gender. “I look up to her a lot as a girl and she has helped me become the woman that I am. Where boys are supposed to look up more to their fathers, girls tend to look up to their mothers more. We see how your mother was, is more how you will going to be. “

Michelle lives in a suburban neighbourhood North of Toronto, which she describes as “isolated” and not very diverse. Michelle’s previous religious school was mostly students of Afro-Caribbean descent, while her current school is more racially diverse. The transition was obviously significant to her and her feelings are somewhat conflicted about it. She talked about how the increased multicultural nature of her school was positive and had opened her eyes to how a range of people live. On the other hand, she shared some frustrations with her new school and some of the White students who seemed to hold some stereotypes about African-Canadians. “Yeah, the stereotypes are really bad. That’s really what gets to me. They
think all Black people are ghetto, and it’s just a big problem, and trying to tell them that stereotypes are not true, when they want to believe it is.” Some girls at her new school have asked to touch her hair because she is one of only a few Black girls. “I kind of let it go because they’ve never seen it”. Michelle seemed resigned to accept these stereotypes and said that she ignores such comments.

When she recounted these stories, the other girls erupted into a chorus of horror and outrage and spent some time discussing how Michelle should deal with such comments. They suggested to Michelle that she organize an anti-racism workshop at her school. Though Michelle described herself as “really pro-woman” and “almost a feminist”, she believes that in her experience, issues related to race, religion and cultural difference have played a more significant role in her life than sex/gender. Michelle’s photos about gender focused mostly on differences between men and women related to appearance, clothing and feelings and less on a social critique of gender. When she wrote her descriptions of her pictures she used language like “it is thought that women…” or “In society it is deemed more “, which distanced Michelle from the observations and perspectives in the photos.

Michelle included two images to illustrate that women are more emotional and express their feelings more openly, while men are expected to be more reserved and less verbal: “Girls are allowed to be more open with their feelings” (see Figure 18).
Interestingly, Michelle’s thoughts reveal the kind of double standards inherent traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity. “I took a picture of these lockers because boys are not allowed to show their feelings as much as girls. For us, it’s ok to say I’m not feeling great today, I’m feeling emotional. But, if a guy says that, people say Oh, ‘you’re gay’ or ‘don’t be a girl’, or ‘you’re a wimp’. I find that happens a lot especially at my school.” She doesn’t discuss this at great length, but gives several examples of how ideas about gender connect to sexuality and heterosexism as well. She is less overtly critical of the differences she sees between males and females, and states them more as a matter of fact, making it difficult to draw conclusions about how she herself feels about them.

Michelle feels that boys get “coddled more” than girls and have more freedom to move around, socialize and date, while parents put more restrictions on girls, especially where dating is concerned. It seems Michelle pointed out how boys are allowed more freedom, while parents control girls more yet demand more of them academically. Despite her slightly reserved nature, she felt comfortable enough to say that she thought it was unfair and shared a story about a conversation that occurred in her class. “In hair and aesthetics, we were talking about gender equality. One girl was talking about how her brother always goes
out and does things, and they don’t care if he dates many girls, but if I say I like a boy, they
don’t like that. I’m not allowed to go out as late as he is, even though he’s younger than me”.

When discussing citizenship, Michelle’s photos showed a multifaceted idea of
citizenship and Canadian identity, emphasizing multiculturalism, peacekeeping and national
pride. She did not include ideas related to social critiques or systemic injustice as some other
girls did, even if she mentioned sexism or racism in anecdotes that she shared informally in
the project. Instead, she highlighted what she saw as the privileges and benefits of being
Canadian, such as a national emphasis on tolerance and inclusion of a variety of religious and
cultural traditions. In addition, she defined national identity in contrast with American culture
and compared the metaphor of the Canadian Mosaic idea with the American melting pot.
Michelle argued that in the U.S., citizens are expected to be American first, while Canadians
are encouraged to retain their cultural heritage. Michelle was the only girl to raise the issue of
censorship. In her opinion, Canada has more freedom of speech than the U.S. and does not
censor information, sharing an example of how in the U.S., television networks refused to air
a television show about abortion, compared to Canada that showed it (see Figure 19). It is
clear that her notions of gender and citizenship are more descriptive and reflect a “softer” or
more traditional idea of citizenship and citizen participation (Andreotti, 2006).

Figure 19. Image of tv screen.
**Participant Profile:**

**Macy Li**

I’ll do it! I thought it was cool, because even the guys didn’t want to do it. I don’t know, like guys are all tough and they can do the stuff that girls don’t want to do. But I was like HA! And I proved them all wrong. (Macy)

![Image of Innuit seal](image)

**Figure 20. Image of Innuit seal.**

As one of the more soft-spoken girls, it was clear that she also expressed a reserve of hidden strength and resolve. At first, she was a bit reticent, but over time, she developed greater trust in the girls and in the process. Macy’s distance prevented her from attending all of our meetings and she occasionally had to video-chat in to our meetings, all of which caused frustration and affected her ability to fully participate in some of the discussions. At one point, Macy was concerned with sharing some of her photos in public spaces and we changed our exhibit plans to respond to her concerns. As with other girls, she displayed a certain amount of concern about her photos being appropriate or good enough for such an event. After a few months of our work together, she began to feel more comfortable reaching out to me and other girls to share her concerns.

At the beginning of our work together, Macy was a 15-year-old student in Grade 10 at Bowmanville High School. Macy’s father’s family was originally from Poland and her
mother’s parents moved from China before Macy was born. Her parents divorced when she was young and she now lives with her mother and younger brother in an apartment in Bowmanville, a town about an hour from Toronto. She is the only girl who lives in a more rural area and describes her town as “very conservative” and “not at all multicultural”. She lives in an apartment with her mother and younger brother, near her Chinese grandparents.

Much like the other girls, Macy is involved in a wide range of activities including dance, model United Nations and her school leadership club. In addition, when she heard about the Because I’m a Girl campaign, she founded a club at her school and subsequently joined the GSB. In addition, she won a citizenship award multiple times from a local leader because of her extensive community work. Despite a full schedule, Macy still made time to take several trips during our work together including a spring break trip to work with Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans and a family exchange in Costa Rica.

Macy is aware that she is “not your typical teenager”. She helps around her house, likes cooking and cleaning and has a vivid awareness of many larger societal issues beyond her own daily life. “I’ve really been mature for my age, and I’ve always known it”, Macy explains. Her parents divorced when she was young and she talked about how it matured her and created challenges for her and her mother. She alluded to these issues briefly but did not want to discuss it further.

In addition to her interest in women’s empowerment, Macy admits to being passionate about the inequalities in Canada related to the treatment of Aboriginal peoples. She shared a photo of a carving she got while volunteering in the Canadian North (see Figure 20): “This is a little seal and I went to Iqaluit like Jane did last year. It’s hand made from limestone and we bought it. I thought it was really cool and it represents all the native people in Canada who don’t have a voice. I’m really passionate about Native peoples and the treatment because they’re not treated fairly at all.” She also included several photos of a trip she took to volunteer at school in Iqaluit, which raised her awareness of injustices of Canadian society.

When asked about how and why she joined the GSB, Macy explained how she had started a BIAAG club at her school after seeing the commercials on TV. She describes
herself as a feminist and explains her belief in women’s empowerment and strength and the need to defy gendered expectations and have strong female role models. She looks up to her mother and acknowledged that: “my mom has basically done everything for my brother and I, and she’s been our main kind of supporter all the way. My dad’s mom is on the sidelines, so my mom, you name it, she’s done it basically. I look up to that because that’s really cool and now I have a lot to live up to but that’s fine. Bring it!” Furthermore, Macy recognizes an obligation to serve as a role model for younger children and expresses the sense of satisfaction she felt when students tell her that they look up to her. “I’ve been complimented on (being a role model) and the kids that I work with have said that I’m their role model and I think that’s cute.”

Macy’s sense of self and her concept of Canadian citizenship was shaped by the fact that her family was the first “different”, non-White family in her small community of Bowmanville. She believes that she really “sticks out” in her community and that that her neighbors look down on her mother because she is a single mother. This kind of judgement obviously felt hurtful to Macy and seems to have motivated her to get involved in work related to gender equality and social justice more broadly. Her interest in fighting for greater recognition of women in society has likely developed out of her close relationship with her mother and the strong women in her family.

She shared a story about her grandparents, who were the first Chinese family in her town and were well known for starting the first Chinese restaurant there. People often stop her on the street to tell her to say hello to her grandparents. In her mind, her difference is both a positive and a negative in her life. While people may be friendly with her because of her grandparents, her peers may make ignorant assumptions about her because of her Chinese heritage. For example, one student asked her if she ate cats.

According to Macy, her school is “bland” and “White” and has a reputation for having problems with drugs and the occasional bomb threat. In spite of her personal interest in women’s empowerment and gender equality, Macy believes that racism and homophobia are more pronounced in her community than discrimination based on sex/gender. Macy relayed a story of a teacher at her school who complained about the continued influx of
immigrants to the province. In response to the statement, the other students turned to look at Macy while the teacher spoke.

Despite having met “awesome people” at her school, Macy still expresses her frustration with the lack of awareness of her peers. She feels that she is different from her peers, not only because of her cultural background, but also because of her interests in social issues, travel and her desire to see the world beyond her town.

![Image of Macy’s town.](image)

*Figure 21. Image of Macy’s town.*

Macy’s photos and comments about gender mostly illustrated the idea of defying gender roles and celebrating the characteristics and behaviour not traditionally associated with women. Unlike some other girls, she did not include any images related to cooking or food as illustration of female roles. Instead, her images were of women rock and blues musicians, people dancing in the street and of her climbing a ladder to build houses for Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans. “It shows strength and perseverance because no one else wanted to do it. So, me the shortest person (said): I’ll do it! I thought it was cool, because even the guys didn’t want to do it. I don’t know, like guys are all tough and they can do the stuff that girls don’t want to do. But I was like Ha! And I proved them all wrong.” It is clear that her images illustrate her enjoyment of defying expectations.
Participant Profile:
Priya Viswanathan

I think I’m kind of the rebel. I’ve always had this different perspective on the world that no one else seemed to understand. So I want to make use of it and particularly in the culture that I’m in, I know that there are so many issues that can affect women’s equality. None of my cousins or anyone seems to care. So, I’m like “why not me? Why not take a stand for something that I believe in?” (Priya)

![Priya's feet on beach.](image)

*Figure 22. Priya’s feet on beach.*

As the oldest in the group and the only girl who was attending university over the course of this study, Priya often seemed to serve as a voice of reason when the girls complained about the difficulties of high school. Often, when a girl talked about something in a one-dimensional or uncritical manner, Priya would gently suggest that the situation might be more complex or might herself offer a story that contrasted with the other girls’ story. The girls did not get offended, but calmly listened to her perspective. She would often remind them of how life changes dramatically when one leaves high school to go to university.

A relatively soft-spoken, easygoing young woman with glasses, Priya was the oldest participant and a first year student at the University of Toronto in Anthropology and Equity
studies when we began our work together. A self-described “tom-boy”, Priya who grew up in a predominantly Jamaican and South Asian neighbourhood in the Northeast of Toronto. “I grew up there pretty much my entire life and we just recently bought our own house, our own apartment and moved out near the edges of Scarborough, and I kind of chose U of T, St. George Campus because I kind of wanted to get away from the “bubble” of being around my type of people so, I just wanted to experience more cultures, more religions, and just different types of people in general”.

A serious student who likes nature, wants to see the world and explore different cultures, she also enjoys Disney musicals and movies. At first, Priya seemed less eager to share her opinions and talk about herself. Soon, and with quiet confidence, she began to talk about her own personal and sometimes painful experiences, even if they served to contrast the stories of the other girls. Priya was born in Canada but her parents came from Sri Lanka as refugees before she was born. Her parents had what she describes as a difficult relationship. Her father is “a traditionalist” who had conservative views of gender roles and did not want her mother to work outside the home. Priya talked briefly about her parents’ divorce without much emotion and explained how her mother split from her father and now works several jobs, including in a factory and at Tim Horton’s in order to support her two daughters.

She describes her parents’ divorce as having a dramatic impact on her sense of self and who she is as a person. Although she doesn’t describe in detail how the experience influenced her, she did describe herself as the “joker in the house, so if I just crack a joke, she’ll stop being mad. So, I’m really good at that…The divorce was pretty bad, and before that time, it was pretty bad as well. So, I know that my sister never saw a lot of things that happened with my dad, as I did, so that has changed me as a person.” When asked to bring in photos that illustrate the most important things about herself, she took one of her mother (see Figure 23): “I got one of my mom, we don’t live with my dad, so my mom is the most important figure for me. I took this picture of her in her most typical setting.” When asked if she or her sister help her mother around the house, Priya guiltily admitted that her mother (Figure 23) does most everything around the house and does not solicit the girls’ help with chores. It seemed that the messages Priya was getting from her family about their
expectations of her as a female were slightly more restrictive than those received by the other girls. She intimated that part of this tension with her mother and family is because of the differences in their education and upbringing. While her mother was educated in Sri Lanka and did not complete high school, Priya has grown up in Canada and believes that this difference explained why her mother does not understand her perspectives on education, travel and her desire to carve out her own life’s path.

Figure 23. Priya’s mom.

She clarifies some of the tensions arising between her own expectations for herself as an independent Canadian girl who wants to see the world and her mother’s expectations of her. Her mother is concerned with how her independence and travel might affect her reputation within her community. While her family encouraged her education and curiosity, they also expect to get married and settle down by the age of 26.

My mom brought it up the other day, actually, after I came back from Bali, I said I wanted to travel more.” My mother said: girls have to have to be more proper because of your reputation”, and I said:, “what guys don’t have a reputation?” And she’s like, “we don’t really care what guys do, but girls, you have to be very careful.” I guess we just come under the microscope more often. People just look at us and our actions more often than guys.
As with the other girls, Priya is resistant to being stereotyped, to having people expect certain things of her because of her race, gender or cultural identities. She sees herself as a work in progress with multiple interests, values and aspects of her personality. Her photos reflected her desire to define herself in many ways, highlighting her Canadian and Sri Lankan heritage, her love of travel, technology, literature, nature, and her “bucket list”.

One of her photos about gender is of her desk and the books, computers and other objects on top, symbolizing the multiple facets of her own identity. Another photo was of the cover of the popular novel *Eat Pray Love*. Some of the other girls rolled their eyes and groaned at the mention of the book, but Priya explained how she related closely to the story.

I thought this is a woman in western society who seems to have everything according to society, a great job, a husband, and yet she’s not happy. She goes on this journey to find herself. I think that many women fall into this trap and they fall into a lull and they just stay there… They don’t do things that inspire them that they dream of. I think this movie is inspiring, the guys ask me, should I watch it. You might think it’s a chick flick, but you will watch it, you will see it is really inspiring to women. After I watched it, I felt so good, I felt so inspired and ready to go out there and do something just for me, and just not care what other people think.

Perhaps this book spoke to Priya because it reminded her of herself and her struggle to find a balance between respecting her mother and her expectations of her and carving out her own path.

The stories that Priya shared seemed to revolve mostly around deconstructing how society often attributes differences between men and women to genetics rather than socialization. She describes herself as a “tomboy” and said that the aspect of being a female that she likes most is proving people wrong and defying expectations. She shared images of

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9 A “bucket list” is a popular term to describe a list of activities and experiences that one wants to have before she or he dies.
both men and women who do not conform to traditional gender expectations this tendency including a photo of her in a marine police uniform from her summer job (see Figure 24). She argued convincingly that young people need to see examples of both men and women who do not follow traditional ideas of feminine and masculine roles so they can serve as role models and alternatives to the norm.

Priya included several images to stress her need to get away from “girly” clothing. For example she shared an image of Converse sneakers, which she believes symbolizes a kind of gender-neutral identity. “(Wearing sneakers) helps you get away from the stereotypes that exist in our clothing. I saw women a lot on the TTC when it was frigid and they were wearing mini shorts and tights and they were not thick, I could see their skin. It seems like they’re doing it not for comfort but because they want to stay in line with feminine expectations. Converse sneakers I find are very popular at the university because they’re very comfortable. Guys wear them, girls wear them, anyone can wear them. They’re all kinds of people wearing them. No one judges them”.

In addition, Priya included an image of a White male Member of Parliament in the midst of giving a speech, which she says is a traditional symbol of White male power. She described how he got emotional and cried slightly while he told a group of high school students about the challenges he had faced in his career because he was gay.

Figure 24. Priya in summer job as harbour policewoman.
Having never been outside of Canada, she was thrilled to be selected as one of a handful of students in her anthropology course to travel to Bali with a course trip (see figure at top of profile). “I have a bucket list and I’ve always wanted to go to tropical place and walk on the beach at sunrise and that’s exactly what we were doing, and so I got to do it. I actually got to do a couple of things on my bucket list”. When Priya went to Bali on her trip with her course, she was shocked that her mother let her go, but admitted that her mother kept the trip a secret from other family members because they might disapprove of Priya’s independence.

Priya’s story added another interesting consideration to our discussion about gender roles and civic participation and the transition from high school to university. Throughout her teenage years, she was also very involved in a range of activities in her school, including being the yearbook editor and a member of the school business club. However, the transition to being a student at one of the largest universities in Canada significantly changed her level of involvement and her joining the GSB at Plan was her first foray into civic activities in her new university life. I was impressed by Priya’s self-assurance, calm and strength of character.

Conclusion

The girls talked openly about the fact that their adult lives are just beginning and that they are still growing and evolving. They frequently shared their dreams for themselves and their adult lives. Janice and Macy expressed some anxiety and concern about what their future might hold for them. The group had many discussions about their plans for university and talked excitedly about the opportunity to travel and visit many countries. When we discussed our final exhibit, one person even suggested taking a trip together as a group. I will discuss some of their shared perspectives on identity, gender and citizenship in the next chapter, where I present their own analyses from our group meetings.

It is clear from these profiles that these girls are both ordinary, well-adjusted teenagers and exceptionally vibrant, engaged young women. They show an awareness of not being your “typical teenager” because of their level of maturity, interest in social issues and
their commitment to making a difference in the multiple communities to which they belong. Their identities are multifaceted and relational, depending greatly on where they are and with whom they are engaging. More importantly, the girls themselves are conscious of this complexity and are explicit about not wanting to be “stuck in a box” (Mihika). Their photographs and conversations show their resistance to being oversimplified and socialized into roles that are rigidly defined by society. In the next two chapters, I will present the girls’ group analyses of their photographs and discussions from our meetings. I have tried to remain true to their language and their findings and will present my own analysis of the entire project in the discussion chapters.
Chapter 5
What Girls’ Think:
Listening (and Seeing) Girls’ Perspectives on Identity and Gender

Studying girls is not just about girls, but about the culture and ideological schemata that sustains a regime of power in the world, namely those of class and those of race. I am not attempting to replace/substitute gender with class or race, but I want to challenge authoritative cultural scripts in making of girl culture. (Bach, 1998, p. 7)

Figure 25. This is my favorite picture. It kind of represents BIAAG. It’s my friend carrying another friend. Which is like girls helping girls around the world and we’re walking through something. The progress might be slow, but we are actually making a difference. (Janice)

Introduction

This chapter will present a discussion of how these young women conceptualize their own identities and the complex messages they receive about gender in society from family, schools, the media and society at large. This examination draws on their group discussions and photographs from the first two group photo meetings that were themed: “All about me” and “All about gender”. In the next two chapters, I have stayed true to the actual language that the girls used in their discussions as well as the themes that they generated from their
own analyses. I will follow these chapters with an analysis of the key themes and discourses emerging from the project, examining them more thoroughly, connecting them to the literature and identifying concepts that are missing in the girls’ analysis.

The history of educational research has excluded and marginalized the perspectives of girls and young women. As discussed previously, there is a growing body of ‘girlhood studies’ literature exploring the lives of girls and young women (Bach, 1990, 1993; Finney, 2007; Gilligan; 1982, 1991, 1997; McRobbie, 2004; Walkerdine, 1991) However, this growing knowledge about the lives of girls is limited, often focused on psychological health and body image, and is not necessarily shaped by a critical examination of how girls understand and learn concepts of gender. In addition, as many have argued (Collins, 2009; Davis, 2008; Denis, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 1997), early feminist research (and indeed some current work) frequently constructed a universal category of women, ignoring the diversity within the group based on how race, sexuality, culture and religion shaped their gendered location. Furthermore, feminist critiques are often regulated to “women’s space”—as being by women, for women, and thus irrelevant to mainstream debates about concepts and practices of civic participation and democracy (Pillow, 2002). Despite the work of feminists, much research in education continues to fail to challenge the “male as norm” framework (Clough, 1994; Leach, 1988; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Tetreault, 1986).

As Canada becomes increasingly diverse and seeks to fulfill its stated goals of addressing societal inequality, it is imperative for scholars, educators and policymakers to examine the intersections of gender, race, culture and nation. What are girls and young women learning about their roles as females in Canadian society today? How do they make sense of their multiple identities (race, class, gender, nation)? What can we learn from the ways they think of their own identities and their concepts of gender?

**Researcher Reflexivity**

My role as researcher adapted throughout the process from researcher to participant to facilitator, in similar ways described by Hall and Callery (2010) in their own research with girls. The girls also shifted from being participants to co-researchers and organizers.
Although I was the one who set the parameters for this study, any new understanding that emerged from this project came out of the interaction between the group and myself. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss in their own work, I was concerned with developing positive relationships with the young women in the group and balancing closeness and trust with a distance enough to be able to critically engage with their words and perspectives. In order to build a collaborative process, our roles needed to be flexible and adaptive. In addition, this flexibility of role also benefited our rapport and had an impact on the research process. This approach helped to glean a number of layers of data that I might not have found if I had followed a more researcher-directed process.

We agreed to have a total of ten six-hour meetings, beginning with a couple of meetings for study orientation, planning, ethics and consent, to principles of photography and composition. The participants produced a total of 200 images, bringing 5 to 10 for each themed group meeting. After each person presented her photos, I asked the participants to identify major themes. Then, they sorted them into piles based on the themes they had identified throughout the meeting. While I watched and occasionally commented, the girls discussed the photos and what kind of label or caption they should use to describe that theme. Since most of the images had a figurative or metaphorical meaning, they were not organized by the object in the picture, but rather by the theme or issue that they represented. Because of my decision to use a participatory inquiry approach, I wanted to let the girls’ lead the analysis process and will present my own discussion in the chapters that follow, which will also serve to draw out some distinctions between how the girls’ viewed our discussions and how I did. This distinction is not only to highlight their understandings and perspectives but also to illustrate their situated-ness and my own, as the researcher.

“All About Me”
Exploring Identity and Self-Concept

Our first group photo meeting was designed to provide an open-ended space for the young women to reflect on their own identities, hobbies, values and things that are important to them. While there is much diversity within the group in terms of race, cultural, ethnic and religious background and neighborhood, there were many common themes that emerged.
from the discussion. As we began to see in the previous chapter, these young women have self-concepts that are complex, multidimensional and constantly evolving, confirming a growing body of scholarship on the nature of identity in diverse, multicultural and pluralistic societies, such as Canada (Deaux & Stewart, 2001; Sirin & Fine, 2008). As Dewey (1954) theorized, our identities are personal and social, shaped by our interactions and relationships with friends, peers, parents, teachers and others. In addition, the girls in this study saw themselves very much as plural, multiple and sometimes contradictory, as Irigaray also found in her work (In Clandinin & Connelly: 2004, p. 219). Sirin and Fine (2008) also described how many young Muslim Americans have hyphenated identities, finding ways to belong in both their American and their Muslim communities.

During this first meeting, the subject matter of the images varied a great deal, ranging from the girls’ dogs, prized objects and books, to family and friends, to much more abstract concepts such as their views about societal inequalities, commercialism and the treatment of First Nations peoples in North America. Out of a total of 55 images, the largest number of pictures (18) were selected to highlight the girls’ hobbies, interests and values. Only 21 pictures included people and only seven were of themselves, eight were of family and six were of friends. The main themes that were identified by the group were the following, from most to least: self, travel and adventure; friendship, family; environment and animals; connections across cultures; society; nostalgia about childhood; boredom; technology; knowledge; and looking towards the future. I will explore these themes in my analysis and discussion chapter after first presenting the girls’ discussions and analyses.
Summary of Key Themes From Girls’ Group Analysis

Meeting 1: All About Me

Themes:
1. Self-concept
2. Adventure, travel and see the world

Meeting 2: All About Gender

Themes:
1. Traditional gender norms
   a. Chores, cooking and cleaning – “Go make me a sandwich”
   b. Extreme masculinity – “It’s men rebuilding what men destroyed”
   c. Gendered patterns of participation – “Girls do activities, Boys do sports”
2. Resistance, resilience and defiance
3. Magazines, models, and makeup

Meeting 3: All About Citizenship

Themes:
1. Pride, patriotism and spirit
   a. Opportunities and access
   b. Care for the environment and the natural world
2. Get informed, get involved and make a difference
3. Celebrate diversity

Meeting 4: All About Schooling

Themes:
1. School and civic participation
2. Hierarchy, social inequality and discrimination
3. Diversity and intersectionality
4. Empowerment and opportunities
Theme 1:
All About Me:
Self-Concept, Values, Beliefs and Interests

The first theme was related to the girls’ definitions of themselves and the hobbies, activities and characteristics that they felt most defined them. Michelle and Jane shared photographs of their ballet shoes and talked about how important dance was in their lives because it provided a place for them to express themselves, even if they didn’t feel comfortable doing it verbally. Michelle said: “I think it’s helped me with my stage presence because I am shy when I don’t know my environment and dance has helped me be more confident. It’s also helped me because you get critiqued by the judges a lot and you (learn) to handle it better”.

![Michelle's ballet shoes](image)

**Figure 26.** Michelle’s ballet shoes.

Similar to Michelle, Jane talked about how dance is a way to connect with her emotions and communicate nonverbally. “It’s become such a huge part of my life. I don’t know what I would do without it. Everyone has that kind of release. I’m not always that good at talking about things, so it’s a release without having to say anything”. Additionally, although Mihika didn’t mention dance, she did share her love of art and poetry as a means for self-expression. “This is my art homework…I’m not really good at speaking about my feelings, so I write a lot of poetry and I draw. I’m really insecure, but it’s my way of expressing my feelings”.


The girls also highlighted aspects of their own personalities, including their sense of adventure, their curiosity about other cultures and their interest in volunteer work. Jane’s picture of her dog running down the stairs of her house was supposed to show her dog’s high energy as well as her own. “I’m yelling or laughing or something, I’m normally bubbly and I thought it was a good candid emotional one”. In addition, Macy shared a photo of a citizenship award that she received from her principal to show her interest in volunteering and working with young people. “I like helping people and making a change and I like strength, especially female strength, because there’s not a lot of that”. Here, she is commenting not only on a hobby, but also on the enjoyment she gets from serving as a role model for younger children.

The girls also conceptualized their own identities as evolving, relational and in flux. Andrea had two images highlighting this aspect of her self-concept. One image of a wet floor sign was supposed to illustrate how she is “not perfect”, and even when she tries her best, she still makes mistakes. In addition, she included an image of a missing block in a street sidewalk: “I took this picture because (it shows that) I’m still not done growing yet. I’m still being filled by different fields and I’m still growing and learning. So my path is still incomplete. It just shows I’m a growing person”. These girls are aware that they are in the
midst of a major life transition into adulthood and they talk frequently about their uncertainty and hopes for the future.

**Theme 2:**

**Adventure, Travel and Seeing the World**

The second most common theme among the girls was their curiosity about the world, a sense of adventure and a desire to travel. In fact, they shared many images (between 15 to 17) that were taken while they were traveling. In addition, they talked about how the experience of trying new things, testing themselves and visiting new places helped them learn important lessons about themselves and their own culture as well. Janice showed a photo of a family trip to the Grand Canyon in the United States.

*I really like this picture because everybody looks so small and you get a sense of how big and powerful nature is. When I was there it took me a few minutes to settle down and be quiet and enjoy the moment. I actually thought of my life and my perception of the world just changed. After I got back, I guess I wasn’t as selfish.*

*Figure 28. Janice’s picture of her family at the Grand Canyon.*
Priya talked about her desire to travel and how her first trip abroad had changed her perception of herself and of her own country. Her family had never been able to afford trips while she was growing up, but when we held our meeting, she had recently returned from a trip to Bali, Indonesia. Since it was her first time on a plane and outside the country, she had initially been worried about feeling lonely and homesick on her trip, but quickly made friends and realized how she could connect with people despite cultural or religious differences. One image she included was of a large statue of the Hindu god, Ganesh. She selected this picture because the statue had reminded her of her own Hindu background.

According to her, she had largely forgotten her cultural heritage growing up in Canada but she often found herself telling her peers about her culture and the Hindu faith on her trip to Bali. Interestingly, instead of feeling out of place, Priya discovered while visiting another culture, she felt more comfortable than she had imagined, and it also taught her something new about her own country. “In Canada, all we see is buildings. When I came back, everything was so grey and boring in winter. (In Bali), everything was lush and green and blue and all these beautiful colors. I thought I would be homesick in Bali, but I felt more at home than I thought”.

Jane also shared several pictures taken on family vacations and adventures. She described how her parents had instilled in her a sense of curiosity about the world. One of her images is of her feet dangling in mid air while she looks down from a zip-line. “It comes from my family. Our vacations are not just lying on a beach. We have gone White water rafting, and this summer we did an aerial ropes course. They are pretty adventurous and like to be outside. They are more into that outdoorsy thing”. She, as with the other girls, expressed her own interest in getting out of her own community, learning about other cultures, traveling to new places and seeing the world beyond her immediate surroundings.

Macy, much like Jane and Priya, shared a love of travel and learning. Her exposure to other places has taught her how people’s lives are not only shaped by culture, but also constructed unequally within national and global contexts. She discussed both positive and negative aspects about her community and society. Throughout our meetings, Macy shared many experiences that highlighted her sense of isolation and her feeling that she was
different from the other girls in her small, mostly White and sheltered community of Bowmanville.

While she described some of the difficulties of living in her community as a racialized minority, she also talked about the privilege of living in Canada, because her neighbourhood is mostly safe and crime-free. When she described her community as “pure and safe”, the other girls reacted strongly and contradicted her, adding that that description is not true in their communities, where there are significant problems with crime. When pushed, Macy clarified, explaining that “compared to other countries, I’m glad to be in Canada and not the Congo where they treat women very poorly”.

While the girls were talking about their recognition of social problems and inequalities in Canada, an interesting sub-theme emerged when they started to discuss the conditions among First Nations communities. One of Jane’s pictures showed the difficulties facing young people in an Innuit community in the Arctic, where she had visited a local middle school. She was surprised to learn about the serious problems with drugs and alcohol among students who were so young. Interestingly, she was not the only girl to share her concerns about the treatment of First Nations peoples in North America. As part of our discussion Janice also included a photo taken in Arizona to highlight the poor treatment of First Nations peoples, while Macy also showed an image from her visit to Iqaluit.

*Figure 29. Macy’s image of a seal statue.*
This is a little seal that I got when I went to Iqaluit like Jane did last year. It’s hand made from limestone. I thought it was really cool and it represents all the Native Peoples in Canada who don’t have a voice. I’m really passionate about native peoples and their treatment because they’re not treated fairly at all.

She explained how visiting this school exposed her both to the poor conditions in the region as well as the close relationships that students had with their teachers and the “positive energy” in a small, tight-knit community. Like most teenagers, this group of girls is negotiating between wanting to fit in to the larger society and at the same time be “themselves” and define their own paths as distinct from the one predetermined by society because of their identities as females.

**All About Gender**

I learned that we actually have power over the things that surround us. I think I learned this as we spoke of our pictures and problems in our society. Gender inequality still exists and is terrible but the girls, and (we were able to) think of ways to solve the issues we noticed. We are all young girls of many ethnicities and values but we all have something in our hearts: the belief (in the possibility of) a better day, a day of no injustice and hate. A little belief and hope can bring you a long way. (Mihika)

The participants in this study showed a complex and sometimes contradictory concept of gender and its meaning in their lives. They readily identified the pervasive nature of traditional gendered expectations in their families, schools and in society at large, while also expressing a desire to defy these stereotypes and define their own identities. They produced a total of 70 photographs for our conversation about gender, which they then sorted into nine categories, including the following: societal restrictions on women; the identification of the continued pervasiveness of traditional gender role expectations for men and women; the role of cooking and food associated with women; the objectification of women’s bodies; makeup; the representation of male violence; and the prevalence of male power. Half of the photographs included people and the actual subjects included images of food, kitchens, make-up, shoes, and books, to name just a few. Interestingly, only four or five of the photographs were self-portraits of the girls.
For the purpose of this analysis, I grouped their themes into three major categories: traditional gender roles and stereotypes; defying gendered expectations; and the objectification of women. Interestingly, most of the actual images did not address gendered expectations in their own families specifically, even if they had talked about this in their individual interviews. They did express an almost equal preoccupation with identifying these expectations and gender stereotypes as they did with defying them, proving people wrong and pointing out other females who were acting against these expectations.

Before they showed their individual photos, I had them do a warm-up exercise where they wrote down all the ideas, adjectives, jobs, personality and physical traits that they associated with being either male or female and those that were either associated with both or were gender-neutral. This exercise seemed to provoke very stereotypical ideas of men (masculinity) and women (femininity), with few words in the neutral category. Some ideas they associated with maleness or masculinity included: construction worker, video games, strong, muscular, stoic, rescue worker, bread winner, athlete, soldier, businessman, not emotional, heroic. When asked about being female (or femininity) they said: maternal, gentle, tidy, mother, curvy, small, dancer, flight attendant, teacher, model, activist, soft, caring, shopping, make up. At first glance, these lists seemed to align closely with very stereotypical concepts associated with biological differences between men and women. After a more comprehensive de-brief, they started to unpack some of these ideas and the differences between the attributes they associated with biological sex, versus societal norms.

**Theme 1:**

**Traditional Gender Norms**

*Chores, cooking and cleaning:*

*“Go make me a sandwich” (Jane)*

The most prevalent theme in our conversations about gender was the persistence of traditional gender norms and stereotypes related to the roles of men and women in society. As I discussed in the individual narratives in the previous chapter, the girls recognized and acknowledged the role that their mothers play in their lives and in their families. The girls
talked about how much mothers do for their children, and how they assumed the majority of housework, including cooking and cleaning.

There were several photos related to the kitchen, food and the care of the home. Janice took a picture of a bowl and a spoon to show how “traditionally and stereotypically, women cook and it’s their role, they are born to do it”. Jane also included a similar image of her kitchen (see Figure 30) to initiate a conversation among her peers about the widespread assumption that cooking is the domain of women, but talked about how her family does not follow these norms.

Figure 30. Jane’s picture of her kitchen.

As Jane described, although women are still most often associated with cooking and cleaning, her family is different. “This is a picture of my kitchen…newsflash, my dad does most of the cooking”. She went on to talk about how this association of women with the household work is still widespread, giving examples of things other students have said at her school. “I don’t know what it is this year, but all the jokes are about how women should all be in the kitchen or just go make me a sandwich…it really bugs me…” Though she is visibly irritated and annoyed at how other students still associate women with cooking, the other girls also discussed how prevalent this association was among their friends and other students at school. Andrea also talked about how her parents’ reinforce these norms by coaxing her to be cleaner:
My mom always says that ‘a girl should be clean. [She] should know how to do the dishes. Here's the thing, I don't understand why it's expected of girls to know how to do these things. I admit those things are important. They're basic human life survival skills that you should know, but I think that it's equally important for guys as it is for girls. I don't understand why my mom has to add ‘because you're a girl you should do this.’ That phrase to me is not necessary. You should know how to do this, period. Not because you're a girl.

When I asked the group about how their families divided up responsibilities within their own homes, the general consensus was that their mothers did most chores within the home (cooking, cleaning, parenting, gardening), whether or not their mother was married or a single parent. Jane and Macy seemed exceptions to this pattern. Macy and her brother both have regular expected chores in her family and Jane said that things are fairly evenly distributed in her house. As I discussed in their individual narratives in the previous chapter, all the girls except Macy expressed guilt about the fact that they did not contribute much to family and housework even after recognizing all the work that their mothers did. I asked the girls to imagine if they would have similar arrangements if they had a family later in life. While they frequently talked about their educational or career goals, most of them had never thought of their future in this way, and all seemed to believe that gender norms are changing rapidly and that they would have more equitable arrangements than their parents.

The girls recognized the persistence of these assumptions that women assume the responsibilities in the home. Janice said: “The key member of my family is my mom. Being Chinese and having that culture, everyone depends on my mom, even though it’s not right to make her do all that stuff. My dad sort of let her know that it’s her responsibility, so basically, she washes the clothes, she folds the clothes, cleans the clothes, and cooks every meal. She does all the chores.” Interestingly, Janice attributes this arrangement to her cultural background and not to broader societal norms in Canadian society. Although not explicitly discussed by the girls, this conflicted relationship with mothers and their role in the family and society was a very pervasive tension expressed by the girls throughout our work. I will return to a deeper analysis of their attitudes towards mothers in my discussion chapter to follow.
Despite the fact that the girls emphasized the continued pervasiveness of gendered roles, they also showed a similar level of resistance and defiance of these gendered expectations. One example is Andrea’s photo of some rice and vegetables that she selected to critique these norms. “I think that cooking and food is unisex and I don’t see how it is supposed to be (associated only) with women. Everybody needs food and everyone has to learn to take care of themselves. If a guy doesn’t get married, he can’t just eat a cup of noodles every night.” It is clear from the comments made by Andrea, Jane, Mihika and Priya that they are resentful of the unquestioned assumption that they as females will automatically take responsibility for cooking and household chores.

These observations led to an interesting conversation about gendered norms about cooking and how society rewards and values men and women differently. Priya pointed out that the biggest chefs are men, while Jane followed up by saying: “it’s not cool to do it in your home. But the second you could be recognized for it, then you’ll do it.” In this conversation, the girls argue how activities in the private spaces (i.e. the home) are devalued as feminine, while men’s cooking in the public spaces are associated with authority, fame and wealth. They do not articulate this double standard overtly, but it is clear from their comments that they recognize that the activities traditionally associated with femininity and womanhood are valued less than those associated with manhood and masculinity. Again, I will examine these significant themes further in my discussion and connect them to the theoretical and practical literature on gender, schooling and citizenship.

**Hegemonic masculinity:**

“It’s men rebuilding what men have destroyed.

There’s no place for women” (Jane)

While most of the images focused on their interpretation of female identity or the feminine, there were a few images that explored ideas of masculinity, male identity and the relationship between masculinity and femininity. In general, the girls’ discussions talked about how male identity is most often associated with strength (and especially physical strength), leadership, aggression, athleticism, and even violence. One is a blurry image of a White businessman in a suit walking rapidly in front of Trump Tower in New York City. He is looking down at his phone or blackberry, not even noticing Jane and her friend standing
behind him trying to take a picture. “I just think of him and all the financial and business power you can have. There is my friend and I with our shopping bags. We’re representing that stereotype pretty well. I think it just epitomizes the power that the working man has and he has a nice suit, and at some point they don’t care about anything else but getting his job done.” In her mind, the second image of Ground Zero is a symbol of aggressive masculinity without the tempering effect of women and femininity.

Figure 31. Picture of Ground Zero.

This is a picture of ground zero, it is a construction site. I found it interesting it was only men walking around there…it was all men rebuilding what men had destroyed. It’s almost like there’s no women in the equation. I don’t want to bring religion into this but the men who did this. They don’t have women high in their society, and the men who are rebuilding this, there’s no place for women there too! There’s still an imbalance in both societies. They’re going to rebuild this and then more men are going to go work there and there are no women anywhere.
Along with the image of violence associated with masculinity, Jane raised the issue of the invisibility of women and feminine attributes in the public sphere, a theme that extended throughout our meetings. Thus, women’s roles are conceptualized as being mostly within the private sphere (related to parenting, home care, cooking and cleaning), while men’s roles are associated with the public sphere (related to governance, business, finance, and power). Even while the girls show resistance to this kind of binary division between men and women, they still identify how there continues to be a divide between the public and the private, and between masculinity and femininity. Although the girls identified this this binarism, it remained under-examined in our meetings, much as it is in our schools and our society at large. Though it is not explicitly stated in our conversations, it is obvious that our roles within our families, homes and private lives are inextricably connected to our participation and contributions within our public sphere. This relationship is central to how we conceptualize citizenship and develop our political and civic structures, institutions and processes and I will explore it further in my analysis chapter.

**Gendered patterns of participation:**

*“Girls do clubs, boys do sports”*

When I had them brainstorm words and concepts associated with gender, it was particularly noteworthy to me that they wrote the word “activist” in the female column. When I asked them why they associated activism with being female, it began a lengthy discussion about gendered patterns of civic participation that they had experienced and observed in their schools and communities. From their perspective, civic participation was synonymous with helping, caring and femininity, whereas positions with authority or power continue to be associated with aggression, competition, and masculinity. Thus, these ideas of defining citizenship as caring were somewhat aligned with ideas of maternal feminism and scholars such as Carol Gilligan (1982, 1991, 1997) and Nel Noddings (1994). This theme returned repeatedly throughout their interviews and our group work together. There was a consensus in the group that in their experiences joining clubs at school, participating in volunteer work and other “civic” activities outside of school, it was mostly girls.

Janice: It’s pretty apparent when you join school clubs, it’s all girls trying to help and the boys are out playing soccer.
Priya: I find it’s true in student clubs, except when you get to the national level, then it’s mostly males…maybe it’s because there’s a lot of travel. Maybe that’s why males dominate that.

Janice: I think those organizations purposely put males as speakers to show the public that there are males who want to help and they’re trying to get more males to help.

Jane: On my trip to Africa with Free the Children they said the average participant is a 16-year-old girl. Of the 20 or so who are going there are only two guys.

The group discussed at length this gendered pattern of participation within their school context, hypothesizing that boys were more interested in becoming star athletes, than being seen “helping out” by joining a club related to social issues. Are the girls’ contributions being ignored or marginalized by being described as “service work” or volunteer work? Would popular and dominant measures of citizenship and civic participation count their activities as citizenship? Finally, these young women also concluded that there might be more men who participate in civil society when activities are national or global in scope because of the prestige and power involved. It seems that according to the girls, there is needed to be more active disruption of these patterns by teachers and schools.

There was debate within the group about the reasons why more boys in their schools do not get involved in volunteer or community service work. It seemed clear to me that they valued their various contributions as citizenship, and themselves as active citizens in their communities. However, their conversations seemed to highlight the more service-oriented aspects of their work because it was more in line with acceptable feminine behavior, rather than defining their activities as leadership or advocacy work.

They agreed that when the work is more physical, as in building houses or planting trees, males are more likely to participate. In addition, they discussed the fact that boys might also be more interested in positions that come with more authority or are associated more with competition and debate, activities more associated with masculinity.
Janice: I think a lot of guys help out outside of school like without their peers noticing, I think it’s only at school that they’re trying to avoid that situation and that label. But, I think they care.

Leigh-Anne: In your schools, are there guys in all the clubs you all belong to, or is it mostly all girls? For example, in model United Nations?

Macy: At debate it’s mostly all girls…

Leigh-Anne: That’s unusual, usually its men.

Macy: Yeah, usually it’s men.

Janice: Even Carolyn Bennett (MP) said all the captains of debate clubs are men.

Priya: In the high school I went to, they had male presidents for five years. When I was in Grade 12, our president was also male and his campaign slogan was: Vote for me because I’m a guy and guys have won for the past four years. That was pretty much his thing and he won.

As we can see from this exchange, the girls are identifying some of the ways in which society grants privilege to the masculine while simultaneously devaluing the feminine. In addition, they believe that some boys are aware of their own privilege and have a sense of entitlement about it, as in the boy in Priya’s story discussed previously. At the same time, they believe that certain forms of participation, such as volunteer work or charity work are associated with femininity and are deemed as off limits for boys. Going against these norms are viewed as having consequences for young people.

**Consequences of not conforming to gender norms**

Another theme that emerged frequently concerned the consequences of not conforming to the norms of gender, in the family, school or community at large. Michelle included two photos of lockers, one pink and one blue (see her brief participant profile in chapter four) to illustrate how males are “not allowed to show their feelings as much as girls. For us, it’s ok to say I’m not feeling great today…but if a guy says that, people say, you’re gay or a wimp…There’s a lot of that at my school.” She goes on to share another image of her brother and father, discussing how important it is for young men to associate with and be
close to their father or other older male role models, as opposed to their mothers. She mentions how boys can be considered weak if they are too close to their mothers. Thus, not only are there important differences between the sexes, but that those who differ from or do not conform to these expectations have social consequences for doing so and these differences are expected and reinforced by their families and their peers. Furthermore, the expectations of gender roles are linked to normative ideas about sexuality and sexual expression.

The girls gave many examples of these consequences for not conforming to gender norms. In many cases, the concepts of masculinity and femininity were associated the perceived “norm” of heterosexuality, which is being reinforced by other students. In one example, Michelle talked about students react when boys are seen as overly emotional: “people say, oh you’re gay or don’t be a girl, or you’re a wimp. I find that happens a lot especially at my school.” In addition to students, the students talked about how teachers and parents also reinforce gender expectations. She shared another story that she had read about a school that was organizing a gender switch day, where the boys would dress up as girls and the girls as boys. “They were going to have gender switch day, a lot of parents called in saying they’re not going to have their sons dressing like a girl, it’s gay and complained and they cancelled it. It’s that whole taboo about how its ok for girls to be more masculine, but not ok for guys to be more feminine”. There were many instances throughout out work where the girls shared similar examples of how parents, students and teachers all acted to reaffirm traditional concepts of male and female.

This double standard is a reflection of the relationship between a dominant group (i.e. men) and the marginalized group (i.e., women), which has been documented extensively in the literature on gender equality in education and gender role socialization. Sensoy and diAngelo (2011) describe how unequal social positioning is reproduced and reinforced by establishing norms with built in consequences for not following these norms. They also describe how these concepts are closely tied to power and who belongs to the powerful group. Thus, it is acceptable for members of the subordinate group, in this case girls, to “act” like the dominant group and assume the characteristics of this group. Thus, it is accepted that girls and women act like, dress like, and behave like males. However, it is not acceptable for
the members of the dominant group to associate themselves with and assume the characteristics of the marginalized group. This concept is central to understanding the relationship of masculinity and femininity that the girls described in their photos and discussions. I will expand on these ideas in the discussion and analysis chapter.

**Theme 2:**

**Resistance, Resilience and Defiance:**

“If you’re letting loose, you’re breaking some big taboo” (Jane)

Indeed, a central theme throughout our discussions was the persistence of gender socialization and stereotyping. At the same time, however, the conversations were filled with complexity and contrast and contradiction. The girls’ also revealed a certain amount of vibrant and colourful resistance to these norms and expectations. These young women are navigating the complexity of a world in flux, which provides mixed messages to girls (and boys) about their roles in the family, school and society at large. These girls sought out and continue to seek alternatives to what they view are the traditional confines of female identity. They talked about the importance of finding role models who show female strength and resilience and who counter the dominant messages about gender. Interestingly, they also included many images of themselves as examples that counter these traditional norms. As Maxine Greene (2003, p. 214) described, young women must create their sense of self “in relation to objectness” and though they may be portrayed as objects, they must find ways to act against it, resist it and develop a sense of control over their lives.

There were several images that were chosen to illustrate the idea that though women may at first seem physically weaker than men, the reality is that women are strong (and even emotionally stronger than men), and that they have a vast reserve of endurance and perseverance. As Greene (2003, p.214) suggests, they are creating a sense of themselves in relation to the “objectness” that is foisted upon them by the multiple systems of power in society. Although they may often be treated in the media as objects, they do have agency and they are not merely reproduced (Gaskell & Eyre, 2004). Jane showed a picture of a very large metal flower in the midst of a New York City street. “The stereotypical person in me says that these flowers are like women, they are kind of out of place, you’re not supposed to have
foliage growing in the concrete jungle…but they are metal, they are strong, they’re standing up. It’s like women are still trying to find themselves. If you let something grow and flourish it can”. In this caption, Jane reveals her belief that even within the powerful infrastructure that surrounds women, they have untapped strength and potential, showing possibilities for agency and resistance.

The girls also shared photographs to point out the ways that they themselves and their friends defy these gendered expectations. There were several images of shoes and in particular sneakers because they are comfortable, but also as a sign of going against what is expected of them “as a girl”. As Priya argued, “there is no fashion that has transcended time or has been applicable to both men and women. It helps you get away from the stereotypes that exist in our clothing”. We can see from their comments, that they are consciously choosing small ways to counteract what they view as undesirable gender expectations, simply by choosing to wear sneakers instead of high heels.

*Figure 32. Janice’s shoes.*
Another idea that they wanted to challenge was the idea that girls don’t get their hands dirty. Macy shared several images of herself while volunteering with Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans, where she built houses and planted trees. One image is of her atop a ladder while installing roofing.

It shows strength and perseverance because no one else wanted to do it. So, me the shortest person said: ‘I’ll do it’! I thought it was cool, because even the guys didn’t want to do it. I don’t know, like guys are all tough and they can do the stuff that girls don’t want to do. But I was like ha! And I proved them all wrong.

Similarly, Jane also brought up the stereotype that girls are expected to be feminine, clean and are not encouraged to be athletic and outdoorsy. Several images of her and other girls canoeing, portaging canoes are examples of her deliberate questioning of these norms.
Figure 34. Jane: These (images) are from the summer, this was my attempt at showing women in the outdoors, this is me holding a frog.

Figure 35. Jane’s picture of a girls’ canoe-portage at camp.

Jane: This is all of us in the middle of a portage, this is at camp. For me, I’ve always been like the boys are the ones roughing it outside, the guys are outside eating sand…my brother did that when I was little. The stereotype is that girls are prissy and they can’t break a nail or get dirt on their outfit, don’t want to go outside and get their hands dirty. I’ve always been the kid who likes to run around and hike and swim and dance in the rain. It’s becoming less of a divide between girls and boys doing that, and I think that also the
reason why some women wouldn’t have done it. Is the pressure to always look perfect and be put together and if you’re letting loose you’re breaking some big taboo. Whatever you have to do to be comfortable.

Mihika: I agree with that. From kindergarten to grade two I had this friend who was a guy and we used to dig up worms and stuff…everyone assumed I liked him because obviously a girl can’t hang out with a guy. I just liked hanging out with him.

Priya: When I was in elementary school, I was a tomboy and hung out with the guys and it made the girls jealous. I got hit in the face with a ball and all the guys came over to make sure I was ok, but the girls were so jealous. And they were like; you were just faking that – they were so mean to me.

This series of images reveal the girls’ desire to defy expectations related to gender and the complexity of both recognizing what is expected of them as well as directly not conforming to them. In addition, this passage also reflects how some of their peers reacted when some girls (such as Mihika or Priya) act against gender norms, and respond to reaffirm these expectations, bringing those that stray back into line. Because Mihika and Priya were less feminine and acted more like “tomboys”, they received very different reactions from other girls and boys in their peer groups. The boys seemed to accept them more as peers, whereas the other girls felt threatened by their deviation from feminine attributes.

**Theme 3:**

**Magazines, Models and Makeup:**

“Appearances are so important and they shouldn’t be” (Mihika)

Girls get the message from very early on that what’s most important is how they look…Boys get the message that this is what matters about girls. We get it from everywhere we look. No matter what else she does, no matter what else her achievements, they value still depends on how they look. (Jean Kilbourne, Senior Scholar, Wellesley Center for Women in film, in documentary film *Miss-Representation*, 2011)

Throughout our work together, the group frequently critiqued the importance placed on women’s appearances and the sexual objectification of women’s bodies. During our
meetings, the participants discussed at great length the pervasive messages they get about how important it is that they remain feminine and sexually attractive to men. They receive these messages from their parents, the peers and the media. “The fact that women and girls have to care so much about makeup and their appearance, it drives me insane”.

These young women are in the midst of a major transition from being girls to having to worry about being adult women, negotiating the conflicting messages about being a female. There were at least three images about makeup and beauty products as symbols of the pressure to be beautiful. “Women spend a lot of time putting on makeup”, Janice said plainly, initiating a conversation about the role of makeup: is it to cover up their insecurity or to enhance a woman’s beauty (Janice), to show individuality in a school where you are expected to wear a uniform (Jane).

The girls expressed anger, frustration and sadness about this pressure and how it teaches girls to hate their own bodies and resort to extreme measures to look beautiful and compete with each other about their physical attractiveness. Mihika shared an image of a young woman in the mall (see Figure 36).

Figure 36. Mihika’s picture of girls in mall.

“She is all done up and made up and wearing a lot of makeup, her hair curled and wearing heels and her shirt was pretty revealing…When I see girls in a mall like that, all dressed up to
impress people. It’s really heart breaking”. The discussions also revealed a strong reaction to the objectification and commercialization of women’s bodies, something the girls identified as getting worse and starting younger. They discussed modeling, magazines and media as the sources of these pressures. They are indeed aware of how gender stereotypes are reproduced in the popular media and the impact of this objectification of girls and women on their everyday lives.

Priya: I don’t know, I see females walking around the mall for 3-4 hours, doing shopping… and wearing three inch heels and I think, how do their feet not hurt? I don’t know if they’re really acting like they like heels. I have a friend who really likes heels, likes the way they look. But some people may do it just to look more attractive to others.

Janice : I was volunteering at the convention centre for an auction and they made us wear heels because you have to be in a gown, supposedly otherwise you won’t look professional and look good for the brand.

Leigh-Anne: What was it for?

Janice : At the metro convention centre for these watches, and these auctions for the elderly. And the heels hurt so badly, after the event was over before the people left, I had enough and I took them off and started walking around in bare feet.

In Janice’s case, she is viewed as an object to help sell watches, and she knows that in order to be acceptable for the job, she must conform to traditional notions of femininity and wear high heels, even while she rejects these expectations and ends up shedding the shoes. Both Priya and Janice’s stories illustrate how the objectification and the commodification of women’s bodies manifest themselves in our everyday lives. Mihika said: “We are always surrounded by pictures of females looking a certain way. There is no respect towards them and no-one sees these images as people, they see them as objects. These norms do have an impact on girls.” These comments were provoked by a series of images about how women are still treated as sex objects.
This is a picture of my cousin at the launch of Victoria’s Secret at Yorkdale mall in the summer (see Figure 37). They had these iconic wings that the models like Heidi Klum wear stationed at different parts in the mall and you can take pictures with them. I think it’s very disgusting because Victoria’s Secret is trying to give young girls the opportunity to compare themselves with a Victoria’s Secret Model. How many girls can you see that resemble a Victoria’s Secret model? It’s ridiculous. They’re chosen among millions of people and you’re putting these wings there for these little girls to want to be like them. My cousin was all over it and I think it’s disgusting!

Conclusion

As we can see from the girls’ images, comments and conversations, their perspectives on gender are complex and sometimes contradictory. Their conceptualization of identity and social location as dynamic, shifting, relational and in flux is very much aligned with many post-modern and recent feminist theories about identity (Mohanty, 1988). We can see from their narratives that within the small group of girls who belong to the GSB, there is an incredible diversity of experiences and perspectives on girlhood, dispelling somewhat the notion of a universal “girl-citizen” (Denis, 2008; Finney, 2003). While they had many shared experiences as activist girls, by using an intra-categorical lens, we can also see nuances and
differences within the group, seeing how race, socioeconomic status, religion or culture also shape their experiences of girlhood (Davis, 2008, p. 681).

There was a clear consensus among the group that girls are still being socialized into seeing themselves as sex objects and some even compete with each other to be the most physically attractive to men. There were photos of strippers, high-heeled shoes, makeup and models. Further, there was also a strong critique of the convergence of mass commercialization and sexualization of young girls. There is a growing body of current research examining the effects of a combination of commercialization, hyper-sexualization and individualization that objectifies girls and young women (Harris, 2004; McClelland, 2011; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2010; Walkerdine, 1991). In addition, the girls described their feelings at seeing other girls defining themselves in alignment with these sexualized images and competing with each other to be the most attractive. However, they also revealed their own conflicted feelings at trying to find a balance between making themselves physically attractive to men and rejecting these norms. This toxic competition between girls is also increasingly being documented (Levy, 2005) and characterized as the pervasiveness of “raunch culture”, where “female chauvinist pigs” actively perform sexuality to reaffirm dominant male heterosexist values rather than striving for genuine sexual desire and connection (McClelland & Fine, 2011, p. 234).

While they point out the myriad of ways in which they are still exposed to traditional gender roles by parents, schools and society, this group of young women also revealed a desire to rebel, find counter-narratives to the dominant story of gender, and identify role models (women and men) who defy these norms and expectations. Indeed, these young women are involved in society in a range of ways, many of which run counter to gendered expectations of girls and young women. Most importantly, this group included several photographs of themselves and of each other actively resisting negative gender norms. They are not only questioning the messages they are getting about their roles as females, but also starting to draw inspiration from each other and identify each other’s strengths.
Chapter 6
What Girls’ Think:
Hearing (and Seeing) Girls’ Perspectives on Citizenship, Civic Participation, School and Curriculum

Figure 38. Canadian flag in Ottawa.

If you want to make a difference in your family, community, you need to know how you’re going to do that. You need to find your cause and be aware of what you’re doing so you can actually accomplish what you want. (Mihika)

Introduction

What would debates about citizenship look like in a pluralistic, multicultural democracy like Canada from the vantage point of girls and young women? What can girls’ perspectives and lives teach us about the ways in which our society in general, and schools in particular prepare young people for their roles as citizens? In particular, how do their discussions about gender and girlhood link to their definitions of the citizen and civic participation? In this chapter, I will explore some of these questions by presenting the girls’
analyses examining the connections, intersections or dis-junctures between their conversations about gender and self and those about citizenship and schooling.

In Canada, as in many countries undergoing rapid demographic changes, there is a growing preoccupation with concepts of citizenship and citizen participation (Hahn, 1996, 1998; Heather, 1999; Kerr, 2000, 2003, 2006; Osborne, 2001; Sears, 2004; Sears, Clarke & Hughes 1999; Stevick & Levinson, 2007; Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Policy-makers and educators are increasingly concerned with how schooling can foster democratic citizen participation, ensure a cohesive society and prepare young people for a changing global world. Some have explored gender and citizenship as well (Hahn, 1996, 1998; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). However, often these debates about citizenship and democracy do not take up the concerns of certain groups, including those of girls, women, and people of color and do not examine how identity factors (such as race, class, culture and gender) shape experiences of citizenship.

The conceptualization and theorizing of education for democratic citizenship are most often constructed with the White, heterosexual, middle class male as norm, the experiences of other individuals and groups have been deemed irrelevant to the teaching and learning of citizenship and political participation (Clough, 1994; Leach, 1988; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Tetreault, 1986). Thus, many have argued that girls and young women have been excluded from democracy and have been rendered politically invisible in the literature (Fox, 2003, p. 406). In addition, as Taft (2011) argues in her book Rebelgirls, political and civic activism of girls is also excluded from the literature on social movements.

This chapter presents a discussion of the participants’ perspectives and photographs about citizenship, civic participation and schooling. I will present the group analysis and the main themes that emerged from these meetings by drawing on the photographs and analyses from the second two photo meetings, entitled: “all about citizenship” and “all about school”. For the most part, in this chapter I have used the language of the girls and stayed true to their conversations and provided limited analysis. I will provide my own discussion and analysis in the following chapter and connect their photos, conversations and themes to the literature on girlhood and citizenship.
All About Citizenship and Civic Participation

As with many of the other concepts we discussed in our work together, the girls displayed a multidimensional idea of Canadian citizenship. The framing questions for these particular meetings were: What does citizenship look like in your family, school, community, Canada and the globe? What kinds of values, activities and ideas are central to being “Canadian”? What makes Canadian citizenship and identity unique? The 7 participants produced a total of 50 images. In their initial analysis, the group sorted their images into 15 main themes related to citizenship, civic participation and Canadian identity. The 3 most popular ones that they identified as “national pride, patriotism and spirit”, “get informed, get involved, and “make a difference”, and “celebrating diversity and multiculturalism”. Another important theme was the recognition of “opportunities” in Canada, which included access to education, information and the ability to participate in a range of civic activities and volunteer work. Other topics included: “local issues”, “belonging, inclusion and safety”, “a questioning of societal values” and “environment, landscape, nature and animals”. I have consolidated their analyses and will focus on the top three themes, discussed in the following section.

Theme 1:
Pride, Patriotism and Spirit

While I was designing this study I wondered if I should be using the language of “the citizen” and citizenship explicitly, for fear of getting a collection of maple leafs, Canadian flags and hockey. I also wondered if a group of teenagers would want to deeply interrogate such an abstract concept as citizenship, when scholars and theorists are unable to fully conceptualize them. The girls did include a large number of pictures related to Canadian national identity, pride and patriotism. There were two photographs of the Canadian flag, one of maple syrup and one of hockey. Michelle showed a picture of a friend holding a Canada t-shirt, arguing that as a citizen, we must have pride in our country: “you don’t have to mask where you come from or your race or religion. So, as a Canadian citizen, you should have pride in where you’re from, because it’s a really good place to come from.” She, like many others, did not go into depth about what this meant to her and gave somewhat of a superficial
answer, perhaps revealing the effects of patriotic socialization processes in her school or in the media. These were the answers they thought they had to give. Andrea shared a picture of a bottle of organic maple syrup, explaining that: “This is the most Canadian syrup to get. It’s organic too it’s supposed to be environmentally friendly and it’s made in Canada. I chose it because it’s very Canadian. We’re very proud of our maple culture.”

![Andrea’s image of Canadian maple syrup.](image)

**Figure 39. Andrea’s image of Canadian maple syrup.**

The photographs of the Canadian flags and other national symbols generated a conversation about how citizens should have pride in and respect for their country. Michelle suggested that Canada is a “great place to come from”, while Jane showed a photo of her brother playing hockey, admitting it was a cliché to associate Canada with hockey. At first, these images all seem purely to represent a kind of “soft” idea of citizenship, valuing merely obedience and nationalism. However, when the girls began to explain the stories behind the images, an interesting contrast emerged between the representation of the flag and the actual activities depicted in them. The two flag pictures were taken when they were chosen to represent Plan Canada’s BIAAG international advocacy campaign in Ottawa. They were asked to speak as youth representatives at the Canadian Parliament on behalf of girls’ rights globally.

Thus, though they showed pictures of the Canadian flags, they had actually taken those images while participating in an international campaign to improve the lives of girls and women around the world. It is likely that they chose the flag because they thought it
represented what they saw as one of the most common images of Canadian identity, which is the maple leaf. In addition, it is possible that they chose these symbols because they thought that I, as a kind of authority figure, might have expected these symbols of patriotism as examples of Canadian citizenship. I will discuss some of these effects of the research relationships and the impacts of power on their analyses in the discussion chapter. Janice went on to share another picture that she had taken of Mihika on their trip.

Figure 40. Janice’s picture of Mihika.

“She’s so bright and happy. This picture symbolizes women in Canada and how they’re given the opportunity to embrace themselves and be better. It’s kind of like the sun shining on women and they’re ready to grow and symbolizes hope.” This picture is one of several of each other and their friends, celebrating their own activism and expression of citizenship. In addition, their sense of national pride is also derived from the fact that they relish the many opportunities they have in Canada.

Their concept of citizenship is also framed as a binary, positioning Canada as a place that gives women a lot of opportunities, in comparison with most “other countries’ in the world. For example, at one point, Macy exclaimed that she was happy to be living in Canada as a woman because her neighbourhood was peaceful and safe. The other girls gently disagreed with her generalization, pointing out that there were problems with crime and drugs in their communities. Macy continued by reaffirming her belief that the quality of life
for women in Canada is better than in other places: “Compared to other countries, I’m glad to be in Canada and not the Congo where they treat women very poorly”. This binary framing is not surprising because it represents some of the dominant ways that gender, identity and citizenship are framed in mainstream school curricula, mass media and public discourse in general. While their observations might have some truth to them, or not feeling nationalistic may in some ways limit their ability to see existing problems and systemic challenges to women in Canada.

Much of the conversations about citizenship were positive, patriotic and about individual civic responsibility, reflecting the girls’ feelings of belonging and membership in their communities, both local and national. In addition, it reflects a certain sense of agency, a belief in the value of their volunteerism, service and activist efforts. On the other hand, most of their conceptualizations of citizenship were limited to being focused on the individual citizen and their civic responsibility. Even while they highlight their own civic activities, they describe them as volunteer work, rather than as demanding the rights and entitlements that are guaranteed to them by their citizenship. Thus, the locus of the responsibility is in them, as the individual citizens, rather than on the government or the state. Thus, they are not entirely conscious of their own activities, but seem to talk about the ideas that they thought I would want to hear. Most often, their ideas about citizenship were defined in terms of giving, volunteering and “helping”, linking closely to ideas about the feminine” and the traditional role of women. I will explore these ideas further in the discussion.

**Opportunities and access**

Inextricably connected to their patriotic concepts of Canadian identity is their acknowledgement of the variety of opportunities that they have to get involved in their schools, communities and expand themselves, learn new things, and continue to develop themselves as human beings. These young women have a certain consensus that life is good for them here in Canada and despite challenges based on race, class, gender or immigrant status, their access to education, and their possibilities for contributing to their country are meaningful to them.
The participants admitted to having some difficulty characterizing what it means to be Canadian and how to define citizenship in the Canadian context. This difficulty is not entirely surprising since defining national identity is an on-going struggle, especially in a diverse society. However, they found it useful to define our national identity by comparing Canada to other countries, such as the United States or their parents’ countries of origin.

There was a vague sense that “things are better here in Canada” (Jane) than in a lot of other countries, but these distinctions were not clearly delineated. Michelle shared a story about an episode of a well-known Canadian television show for teenagers called Degrassi that took up the topic of abortion. Apparently, while the episode was aired in Canada, it was not allowed to be shown in the U.S. because it was too controversial a topic. Michelle then explained how this story illustrated to her that Canada is freer than in the U.S. and has less censorship. Another aspect of this comparison is the notion that the U.S. is a “melting pot and Canada is a “mosaic”, where people are encouraged to celebrate and retain their family’s cultural heritage, unlike the U.S., where people are expected to put their American identity first. She shared a photo of a Jamaica t-shirt and a collection of mementos to illustrate how “in Canada, we value and celebrate cultural diversity. You are encouraged to be Canadian but you can also be your own culture too. America, it’s more of a melting pot, you’re not Jamaican, you’re Black. Here you can say you’re Jamaican, or Jewish and I like that about Canada.”

*Figure 41. Michelle’s symbols of Jamaican heritage.*
The girls who moved to Canada as children or whose parents still have a close relationship to their families’ cultures, also compared Canada to their home countries. Although not entirely clear how they are drawing their conclusions, they are talking about the experience of being female and the myriad of opportunities they have growing up here in the GTA. Mihika showed a picture of the Canadian flag:

Mihika: I still think being a Canadian, it’s really important to be thankful for where you are. My parents are Sri Lankan and if I were still there, I wouldn’t have half the opportunities I do here.

Leigh-Anne: Like what?

Mihika: school, education, opportunities to volunteer, classes like this being here

Mihika’s comments are typical of many of the conversations that the girls had about citizenship. Janice also showed a picture of the flag from their trip to Ottawa, arguing that the image really symbolizes the many possibilities available for girls and women in Canada, again, comparing it favourably to “outside”. “These are the most obvious symbols of being Canadian. There is light shining on the road and the pavement has already been set. It’s a much easier road than if you’re trying to achieve things elsewhere and we’re given more opportunities.”

Care for the environment and natural world

Another theme that emerged from our discussions is the importance of caring for our natural world. To these girls, it is not only an important thing for all people, but is a key value that they associate with being Canadian. Janice explained how she believes that young people in Canada are more serious than in the United States and were brought up to be more committed to protecting the environment. She also showed a photo of a dog and talked about how in Canada we were able to protect the rights of animals as well, unlike in many parts of the world. When probed about how she drew this conclusion, she revealed that she was an avid consumer of American media and watches such programs as Toddlers and Tiaras and The Jersey Shore.
In my first picture, I volunteered this summer for this Korean place where you volunteer at different youth shelters. We spent a week planting trees in the hot blazing summer at Downsview Park. It was so bad because it was hot and there were a lot of mosquitos. I think this symbolizes how Canadian kids really care for their environment and they want to fight for a better future and for the next generation. Canadian kids really care about the environment and they interact with others. I think the bond between Canadian kids is kind of different than American kids, I think (Americans) like to party more.

Figure 42. Janice’s picture of volunteer work.

Theme 2:
Get Informed, Get Involved and Make a Difference

A recurring theme throughout our year of work together was the idea of civic responsibility. At one point, Andrea described the need to volunteer: “I think volunteering is very important to give back. As Canadians, we have a lot to stuff that was given to us. I think it’s really important that you’re not just taking things from Canada, it’s a two-way street, that you’re also giving back to your community.”

In this meeting, the participants emphasized the idea that individuals should get informed about public issues, frequently using phrases such as “get involved”, “share your culture and passion”, and “make a difference”. The participants also highlighted a variety of social and political issues and shared many images of their ideas of what it means to be an
active citizen, including examples of their own volunteer work and civic activities, which ranged from more skills-based clubs, like a photography club, or the Cadets, to volunteer service work like planting trees or fundraisers for the Because I’m a Girl campaign. They used such phrases as “don’t be afraid to get involved”, “interact with others”, “care about next generation” or “be concerned about social justice and equity of your country”. In addition, the activities were at various levels and in different spaces, including at the school level or local community, and NGOs or community organizations and were both local and global in scope, some of which were linked to their home countries.

Additionally, the participants described how doing volunteer or service work not only improves their community or country, but also benefited themselves. Mihika shared an image of a cousin, one of many students who she tutors regularly.

![Mihika’s cousin](image)

*Figure 43. Mihika’s cousin.*

This is my cousin, who I regularly tutor 2 days a week. I took a picture of him while he was studying. One thing that is important is to influence others in a positive way. It makes my day every time I tutor him or another girl. Every time I teach them something and I know they’ve gotten it, when they look at me and smile, it makes me feel good as a person. I know that I’m actually making a difference in their lives. Having an impact on someone, especially people younger than you is really important.
This comment from Mihika is representative of many of the photographs and comments by the entire group, many of whom talked about their own feelings of satisfaction when helping others and the importance of individuals being active in their communities. In their view, active engagement in the multiple layers of community is a key aspect of being a good Canadian citizen. Similarly, Jane described all the many examples of her own civic participation, many of which she describes thusly:

I put together all the charity, service things I could find at the moment. I think it’s important to find your cause and know what you’re doing and know about it, like and read up on it and the more you know about it, the more you’ll be inclined to do something about it. There are international and local things, you can’t do everything but you can do at least one thing, even small things. A lot of us are concerned with saving the world, but you have to do a lot of small things to lead up to that first. So, you have to find what your thing is going to be.

Andrea also viewed citizenship as a two-way relationship between the individual’s relationship to their community and the state’s relationship to the citizen. “It’s important to spread love and kindness because it’s what every country needs to be successful”. It appears that because these girls have connections with other countries, they have developed a sense of citizenship that not only includes a sense of belonging both in Canada and their home country, but also an appreciation for their privileged situation in Canada. In addition, they view civic responsibility as a key part of their notion of belonging to a Canadian society. Thus, these girls have a wide range of ideas about civic participation, ranging from caring and inter-personal relationships, similar to many feminist scholars to community involvement, volunteer work and voting.

**Theme 3:**

**Celebrating Diversity and Multiculturalism**

One core theme that emerged when discussing citizenship, and indeed throughout our work together is the importance of celebrating the diversity of the Canadian population. This valuing is grounded in the sense that Canada is an officially multicultural country and the girls repeatedly returned to the idea that Canadians must appreciate cultural, ethnic and
religious diversity. “Living in Canada, it is important being able to share your culture with others is the most important thing as a Canadian citizen”. In addition, they raised the fact that the country must balance the multiple demands placed by various cultures and religions.

Interestingly, they rarely discussed how diversity of culture and religion intersected with issues of gender and the experiences of being female, Michelle talked about her family’s religious beliefs and two other girls attend religious-based schools. Macy did share a photo of a church to point out how there are many social conflicts that arise because of religious differences, but that it is part of being Canadian to embrace and tolerate religious diversity. Jane said: “We need to find a balance between everyone and be able to talk about different beliefs and take into account that to know Canada is multicultural.” Janice shared a photograph (Figure 44) of herself, Andrea and Mihika when they travelled to Ottawa with Plan to give a speech on behalf of girls’ rights globally. “This picture symbolized multiculturalism. She’s Sri Lankan and we’re yellow! It shows in Canada, we value friendship.” As she described the photo, the girls started laughing, responding to her use of the word “yellow”, which she used deliberately to be funny. Though she was just being humorous and colloquial, her use of these terms reflect how the larger society’s somewhat superficial framing of multiculturalism and diversity.

Figure 44. Girls in Ottawa for speaking opportunity at Parliament.
Even as the girls generally discussed that Canada was inclusive of diverse cultural and religious traditions, a few points of contradiction and disruption emerged as they discussed. Andrea was one of the only girls to talk explicitly about the need for social critique, even to hold the government accountable to its responsibility to make the country “better” and more inclusive of all people. She showed a picture of a shorikin, a Japanese fighting star, to express how at different times, individuals must either support or fight against the government, to push for greater equality in society. When I asked her to expand on this statement, and describe more specifically what would prompt her into social action, she identified gender inequality, homophobia and environmental pollution and climate change as key issues about which she was passionate. She also included a gay pride flag as a symbol of citizenship, explaining that she is passionate about fighting homophobia and working to make society more inclusive of gays and lesbians as well.

Both Macy and Michelle live in more suburban areas that are much less diverse than the rest of the group who attend multicultural, inner city schools. It became clear over the year, that these two girls both felt their experiences were different from the other girls, who lived more in the city centre. They seemed to feel that their school experiences, in terms of content, relationships with teachers and administration, were not as sensitive and inclusive of all aspects of diversity and inequality. As the conversation developed, Macy began to describe some of the comments that had been directed at her and her parents, growing up in a predominantly White town. She describes how people reacted to her parents’ inter-racial marriage. “Friends were ok, but when they were walking around town, people would look at them…they would stare and wonder why.” In addition, other students would question her about her Chinese heritage, asking ignorant questions such as: “You get so angry inside. People ask me does your family eat cats? Because I heard you’re Chinese. Just because I have some blood in me, doesn’t mean like I’m in China a 100 years ago. I keep up. Surprisingly, I know.”

**Discussion**

Despite an initial emphasis on national pride, the girls also connected notions of citizenship and national identity to such themes as race, culture, and geography. It also
became obvious that these young people had a strong sense of commitment to their multiple communities and also placed a strong emphasis on the responsibility of the individual citizen. In many ways, a unifying theme of their concepts of citizenship was, as Paul Lichterman (1996, p. 1) has called “public-spirited politics” and commitment or a dedication to some public good. Additionally, their idea of Canadian identity and citizenship in the Canadian context is multidimensional and intertwined with Canada’s cultural, racial and religious diversity. They believe that a sense of civic duty can be expressed at various layers, in their local community or school, through participation in volunteer work or at the national or global levels through nongovernmental organizations.

They stressed the importance of citizens becoming informed, educated and taking advantage of the many opportunities in Canadian society. Indeed, in their view, people must get involved in the various communities to which they belong. In many ways, the girls in Project Citizen-Girl expressed a desire to improve their communities and were not only concerned about their own well-being, but also that of other people as well. Their sense of commitment is similar to the girls in Taft’s (2011) study looking at girl activism across the Americas. She found that despite many significant differences across countries in terms of the girls’ socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, the young women activists that she interviewed all expressed a desire to act “for the good of communities, not just the good of individuals” (Taft, 2011, p. 26).

In addition, the girls in my study also provided many examples of the ways in which they actualize this belief themselves. In defining Canada, they referred to its reputation within the international community for politeness, peacekeeping and multiculturalism. They mentioned its vast geography, its aboriginal peoples, and the relationship of its peoples to the natural environment. In addition, they defined Canada in relationship to the United States and also to their families’ countries of origin. Some girls did discuss the need for citizens to push governments to make the country more inclusive by addressing societal inequalities, in particular those based on race, gender or sexuality. However, it is important to note that, despite the fact that the Girls Speakers Bureau at Plan Canada is a group focused on girls’ rights and is very much informed by discourses of human rights, none of the girls raised this issue or nor referred to Canada’s Charter or other international agreements on human rights.
While they may casually refer to the importance of human rights, they do not fully appreciate the meaning of this and the entitlements that come with belonging to a state. Though Andrea talked about the importance of pushing the state to be more inclusive of gay rights and women’s equality, the girls generally viewed the onus of these rights on the individual citizens, as opposed to the state.

All About School

Our final group photo meeting was designated as being “All about school”, and the girls were asked to bring in images that illustrated their experiences of being female citizens in a school setting. They decided that in order to stimulate discussion, they only needed to bring in five photographs each. They brought in a total of 36 images. In our conversations about how identity and citizenship are represented in their school experiences, the girls revealed their awareness of how education is both empowering and a means to a better life, as well as a hierarchical structure that reproduces societal inequalities (based on race, gender, sexuality). The group reflected on the pressures they felt within the school context of how to balance being themselves and standing out from their peers, with their need to fit into the larger group and meet the expectations of them. In addition, the group commented on the impact of both excellent and innovative teaching as well as uncaring administration that prioritized school reputation over relationships with students. Interestingly, but perhaps not entirely surprisingly, there was limited discussion about teachers, teaching and actual classroom interactions and learning.

About half of the images included people and the other half did not. Out of a total of 28 pictures, 11 included people, six were about peers, two related to teachers, three were about textbooks and four were about administration. The girls created 14 total subthemes and then consolidated them into three main areas, which I will now discuss. These four core areas organized from most prevalent to least prevalent include: “school and civic participation”; “diversity and intersectionality”; “hierarchy, societal inequalities and discrimination”; and finally “individual empowerment and role models”.
Theme 1:
School and Civic Participation

Andrea shared an image (see Figure 45) of her own feet walking down a narrow, spiral staircase as a metaphor for her feelings about schooling. With it, Andrea was highlighting how education is both difficult and potentially dangerous, but is also a way to ensure yourself a successful life.

Figure 45. Andrea’s image of stairwell as metaphor for school.

Another aspect of school experience that the girls discussed was their feeling that schools in Canada promoted a sense of cooperation among young people in spite of their racial, religious and cultural differences. Janice’s images of a group of cheerleaders and dance team as well as Macy’s dance team picture showed how they believed that school promotes interdependence and the importance of working together. “In Canada, we have a lot of opportunities to do a lot of stuff at school not academic outside school stuff, like cheerleading, football and basketball. It’s fantastic because it helps kids to find out what they want. In Canada, we promote teamwork a lot and do a lot of activities in class”.

This comment provoked an interesting debate about how schools in Canada compare to those in other countries. After Janice’s comment, Andrea asked if she could make a comment. She then shared a story about a teacher who had a student from somewhere in the
Middle East who was copying off another student’s test paper. Apparently when confronted, the student said: ‘isn’t this good that I helped him because without me, he would have failed’. Apparently, in those cultures, it’s more important for the group than one person.” Andrea was gently questioning Janice’s generalization about Canada. Despite this disagreement, the group did share many images about dance teams, model United Nations and cheerleaders as examples of the myriad of opportunities that students have in Canadian schools to learn about themselves, their interests and as Mihika aptly described it, “test themselves”. They also emphasized how it is important to acknowledge that no matter what anyone accomplishes, they always need to depend on and collaborate with other people.

In the discussion, there were surprisingly few references to teachers, teaching and learning. There were a few photographs that did highlight the importance of having teachers who care about their students and were able to tailor classroom learning to their students’ diverse needs. Jane talked about her experience of having been moved to another school because she had been identified as being gifted. She described the positive impact it had on her because the teachers at the new school were able to meet the needs of her and other students by developing creative strategies to stimulate their learning and keep their motivation high. She presented a picture of an activity at her school where students competed to raise money for a school in Nigeria.

Figure 46. Jane’s school activity.
Every year we have a day called share a life day. It’s a fundraising day for a sister school we help in Nigeria. On this day we can bring upwards of $15,000, which we can send to Nigeria. It probably goes over people’s heads but what amazes me is the cost of the tuition of one girl in our school can fund their entire school for a whole year. Most people do this day for the fun of it. Every class does one activity and you walk around and you have to pay to do all these things.

Similarly, Mihika included a photograph of her art teacher, who she called “awesome” because she was able to relate well to her students and serve as a role model.

One important comparison that emerged from their discussion of their school experience was their feeling that even though they learned about Canadian history, it was often defined in relationship to, or perhaps overshadowed by, the U.S. Michelle talked about how they were discussing this relationship in her history class. Her teacher had discussed how Canadians often define their sense of national identity by comparing Canadians to Americans. Michelle gives the example of how people in Canada often make themselves “feel better” by talking about how there is less crime in Canada. One of Janice’s images was of a textbook with an American flag on the cover. “My school is really influenced by American culture, like a lot of schools in Toronto and Canada in general. We would talk about stuff in Hollywood and a lot of the time that becomes our conversation, we talk about that at lunch.” This conversation extended into an analysis about how the mass media, economic and political power of the U.S. allows it to have a greater impact in the world than Canada.

**Theme 2:**

**Hierarchy, Societal Inequality and Discrimination**

In spite of the generally positive attitude of the girls to school, they also commented on the hierarchical relationships that structured their school experiences. They commented on how issues of authority and control played out in the daily workings and relationships within the school context. Jane included a photo (see Figure 47) of skyscrapers in New York City taken at night as an excellent metaphor for hierarchical relationships in education. Because it
was taken from above the building, it is almost an abstraction. She explained how for her it symbolized the unequal relationship students have with their teachers.

*Figure 47. Image of New York City as metaphor for hierarchy of schooling. As Jane says: “The teacher looks down on you, and there is all this chaos”.*

The girls had a lengthy discussion at the beginning of our meeting about school administrations and their perception of how they manage and control the atmosphere in the school.

Michelle, Andrea and Jane talked about their school principals as prioritizing school reputation and image over real connection with the students. “My school is too concerned about keeping up the school image”. Similarly, Andrea said that the principal in her high school only cares about her school’s reputation. Michelle described a number of things about her school that illustrated the distance between administration and students. One image is of a security camera (see Figure 48) in the ceiling of her school, which she said makes her feel like she is always being watched.
“There are too many security cameras”, said Michelle. She went on to discuss her principal, whom she feels cares little about the students and more about controlling the school climate, ensuring its reputation. “According to her, her school administrator “wants (them) to be more conservative” and “I don’t think the teachers like her very much”. She also shared an image of her friends pointing at announcements in her school hallway to show how her school administration is more concerned with controlling the environment than building a sense of community and school spirit.
Here is a picture of my friend looking at announcements in the morning. They play right after the first period is done so no one wants to listen to it, so no one can get involved because they can’t hear it. They asked the principal, but she doesn’t want to change it. Every time I try to join a club, I wait like 30 minutes after school to join the announcements team and no one showed up. Then I tried to go to the office and they said they don’t know where that person is.

This image stimulated a rather animated conversation where the rest of the group encouraged Michelle to do something to improve the atmosphere of the school. This conversation raises the questions of how schools promote active student engagement. It is clear from the contradictions in the group discussion that some students, like Janice or Priya felt that their school made a concerted effort to provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their communities through clubs and activities. In the previous excerpt, however, Michelle is describing some of the ways in which her school is failing to promote student engagement in her school and community.

Michelle: I think its’ because it’s new. It’s really new.

Mihika: Yeah, but it should get started on a good foot!

Jane: it’s better to start off good then have to change it.

Janice: I think you really need to slap them.

Jane: The fact that you realize it is good. Lots of people might look at the mural and ok. The fact that you realize it is a good thing so all the more power to you to go and talk about it.

Mihika: It’s going to be hard because I hated talking to my principal.

Michelle: She doesn’t care about anyone unless you’re really smart or you’re a real trouble-maker.

The other girls in the group reacted to Michelle’s stories about her school and got together to encourage her to speak up and try to improve the environment.
The discussion of hierarchy also gravitated to how other forms of systemic inequality and discrimination were also present and reinforced in their school experiences. Janice described how when she mentioned her advocacy work on behalf of girls, her teacher “always asks me, ‘what about the boys’”. She also shared a story about a teacher who made comments about the many students in her class, many of whom were new immigrants to Canada. “One of the teachers was trying to learn Chinese, but he couldn’t get it right so a lot of people were laughing at him. He said, you guys don’t speak English very well and I don’t make fun of you. I guess that’s really rude. I wasn’t there, but my friend said everyone was a speechless.” Similarly, Macy gave some examples of how teachers made racist or homophobic comments in class. “They are not sexist, but I’ve heard quite a few comments on race, religion and orientation, which is not good… I’ve heard a few teachers say that being gay is wrong”.

Figure 50. Michelle presented a photograph of a painted mural from her school, which shows an image of a White male superimposed over the continent of Africa.

She described how she and some of her friends felt the mural was racist and seemed to take agency away from Africans and give credit to the White man. This photograph also stimulated a rather lengthy and animated debate among the girls about the messages being sent by the school. Mihika said it was racist and other girls chimed in, trying to convince Michelle that she should organize a workshop on racism at her school.
The reinforcement of systemic inequalities is not limited to the school administration and the occasional teacher comment. For example, Priya talked about her peers’ reaction to her aspirations to work at the United Nations.

My Grade 12 calculus teacher, and so I was really frustrated at that point. And sometimes the guys like to joke around and whenever I say I want to … I have these big aspirations. Like if I had my dream job, I wouldn’t want to be an actress, I’d want to work for the United Nations. And they’re like, “you really think you’re going to get there?” And I’m like, “why? Is it because I’m a girl?” And they’d joke around and say “yes.” And I know they’re joking, but it’s just the implicit messages that come behind that, so I don’t like that, and I sometimes say it quite explicitly, and that’s why whenever I get frustrated, I tend to … especially with guys, I tend to punch then, not hard, just on the shoulder, just to show that a girl isn’t afraid to react in that way.

It is not only teachers and administration that reproduce inequality, as the girls pointed out. Indeed the students themselves also reproduce stereotypes based on gender, race or cultural identity and the girls gave multiple examples of this.

**Theme 3: Diversity and Intersectionality**

As with our other meetings, the theme of valuing diversity and connecting across difference was viewed by the girls as key to their experiences of school in Canada. They felt that their school life gave them opportunities to learn about the many cultures represented in Canada and make close friends with other students from different backgrounds. Priya shared several images of her peers to highlight how diverse her high school was and the opportunities young people had to become exposed to other cultures. In one image (Figure 51), a male Chinese friend with a silly expression on his face was pointing at a Bollywood poster.

Priya: Every other year in my high school, we have international night. The floor will be every single country, of students and teachers and this was when we were in the Indian section, this is my Asian friend and he is pointing at a Bollywood poster. He definitely loves South Asian culture.
Andrea: I watched a Bollywood movie!

Priya: My school was predominantly South Asian, but there were South Asian and Black people. Everyone was pretty accepting of each other, especially my grade, I think it’s because it was so small. It was one of those nights that we could all come together and enjoy each other’s food and cultures and it was a fun night. He became so interested in Indian culture that his ring tone became one of the most popular South Asian songs that are out there.

![Figure 51. Priya’s friend showing appreciation for Indian movies.](image)

Though most of the images were about cultural differences, Andrea also took a snapshot of a gay pride flag to talk about her belief that schools needs to be more representative of sexual as well as cultural diversity. There was much debate about the prevalence of homophobia and anti-gay sentiment in their schools and communities. Two of the girls attend Catholic schools and they described some of the tensions arising between the more liberal and conservative elements within their schools. Despite varied opinions, there was a general consensus among the group that there should be more acceptance and inclusion of sexual diversity in schools along with cultural or religious diversity.
**Theme 4: Empowerment and Opportunities**

The discussion revealed that all these students are very involved in their school communities, and perhaps more so than many average high school girls. It is clear that although they recognize the hierarchy inherent in schooling and the prevalence of prejudices and inequalities in their school experiences, they still view it to a large degree as a key to their empowerment as females, especially in comparison to girls living in other regions of the world. Janice, Andrea and Mihika felt grateful just being able to go to school freely and have the options of joining many school teams and after-school activities, which is a privilege not granted to many girls around the globe. For example, Mihika shared an image of her feet walking to school in the snow.

When she visited her family in Sri Lanka, she realized how different her life would have been if she had grown up there and admitted that she was “thankful to be living in Canada”. She realized how in Sri Lanka, it was difficult for girls and young women to move about freely and not be allowed to go alone to school for fear of being sexually harassed or unsafe. She described a scenario when she was followed home by an adult man who was harassing and propositioning her. She was only 13 or 14 at this time. In addition, Mihika expressed her happiness at being able to be involved in many activities through her school in Canada than she would have if she had grow up in Sri Lanka. “I still think being a Canadian, it’s really important to be thankful for where you are. My parents are Sri Lankan and if I were still there, I wouldn’t have half the opportunities I do here”.

Andrea also compared Canada to her parents’ home country of China. She shared an image of her library card and other identification cards to discussion how she valued the incredible opportunities she had growing up in Toronto.
Andrea talked at length about how her parents moved to Canada to give her better possibilities for her life. In many ways, the girls who have an awareness of other countries, either because their parents’ immigrated, or because they have close ties to other countries, define their sense of Canadian identity and citizenship in relation to their country of origin. Additionally, the girls also see themselves in relation to their peers, expressing their difficulty in balancing individuality with conformity. The girls expressed that they feel as if they don’t fit in with their peers, perhaps because of their academic achievement, their interest in social issues such as feminism or social justice, or their limited interest in things that interest their peers.

**Conclusion**

It was clear from these analyses that the girls’ ideas of citizenship are defined through cultural and religious diversity as well as the importance of individual civic responsibility in the multiple layers of community to which they belong. Their conversations about schooling reveal their own conflicted beliefs that education is both an exciting opportunity to gain greater access and respect in society, while also recognizing the reproduction of inequality inherent in a hierarchical space such as education. In addition, they enthusiastically recommended that schools should provide more spaces to critically engage with concepts of
gender and gender role stereotyping and include the stories of women, people of color and other groups who have been excluded from exiting curricula.

Their debates about self, gender, citizenship and schooling, though showing some definite crossover themes across meetings and a circular logic, returning to some similar topics and ideas. However, it is significant to note that there was limited theoretical crossover and intersection between their experiences of gender socialization and the ways in which they were talking about citizenship and their citizenship roles. Andrea and Janice both talked explicitly about they felt their Chinese heritage led to gendered messages about their behavior, their roles in the household, and expectations about how they relate to others. They felt that these expectations were stricter and more unequal in their houses than many of their other friends. Priya also talked at length about how she felt her Sri Lankan heritage, and her mom’s level of education had impacted the expectations of her as a female as well. She also believed that her mother had stricter rules for her than many of her other friends’ parents. In our earlier conversations when asked to think about their experiences of being female, they talked at length about traditional gender stereotypes, the traditional roles of women (most significantly mothers) and the societal valuation of girls for their appearance. I will discuss these tensions is more detail in the following chapter.

In addition, these conversations highlighted the ways that the “feminine” and women’s contributions within the private sphere (e.g. the family and the home) were systematically devalued (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1994; Pateman, 1988). When asked to consider how they define an active citizen and the notion of Canadian identity and citizenship, very few of those earlier issues resurfaced. While they did include images and stories of their own civic participation, volunteer work and activism, they were mostly defined in line with traditional gender roles and there was no exploration of the gendered roles within the private sphere. In fact, the private sphere had been erased almost altogether. I would argue that the gendered messages about being feminine did play an important role in shaping their ideas and enactment of citizenship.

This finding is indeed significant and seems to validate some analyses by feminist, anti-racist and post-structural critiques of citizenship in education. Although the girls pointed
out the continued exclusion of women and gender from their school experiences and the official grand narrative of Canada, they themselves did not include it in their own discussions of Canadian identity. They also seem to define citizenship in Canadian society mostly in terms of the individual and their responsibility to their communities. This series of conclusions will further be analyzed in next chapter.
Chapter 7

Surfaced, Smothered and Silenced Voices:
Discourses of Girlhood, Schooling and Civic Participation

Girls and boys continue to learn through experience that girls have less status less authority as decision-makers and participators in shaping their public or private lives, and that implicitly or explicitly society approves of girls being girls and boys being boys. (Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence, 2001, in Girls Action Foundation, 2011, p. 7)

![Image of media content](image-url)

Figure 53. Jane’s picture of media to illustrate how Canadian priorities are misplaced.

There are so many people who can care less about what’s going on in Libya but they will not know what to do with themselves if they don’t know what Angelina Jolie had for dinner, and where she ate dinner. I think people’s priorities are just wrong because they look up to these people. I just think people need to learn about (real) things, because the only way you are going to want to do anything is if you know about them (Jane, age 15).

Introduction

A brief scan of popular media for issues related to girls gleans such show titles and headlines as “Mean Girls” (Waters, 2010), “Maxim’s Hottest Girls”, “Pretty Little Liars” (King, 2010), “16 and pregnant” (Freeman & Savage, 2009), “Toddler and Tiaras”(Pate, 2009), and “Gossip Girl” (Schwartz & Savage, 2007). Young women are often infantilized,
hypersexualized and presented as manipulative, looks-obsessed, and mean-spirited sex objects. In addition, the appearance of girls and women in school curricula in Ontario are also limited and limiting. In the more than one year of interviews, meetings and conversations with the young women who participated in my study, I participated in debates, group analyses, and discussions on a wide range of topics, well beyond those in mainstream media, school curricula, textbooks and fairy tales. Our meetings explored issues commonly associated with teenage girls such as television shows and magazines, as well as others rarely connected to girls, such as power, democracy, leadership, development and systemic inequality.

Our meetings were scheduled for four hours but lasted at least six. I did not want to control our group meetings, but rather to let them flow naturally, allowing their interests and priorities to emerge, rather than imposing my own. The unstructured conversations produced a mix of topics and personal stories where they shared problems with friends at school, incidents when students made racist, sexist or homophobic comments, observations about popular television shows, international news, and future aspirations. For example, they brought news clippings related to our weekly topic, including one about fashion designer John Galliano’s arrest for antisemitic comments in France, and another story of a young American rape victim who had been accused by neighbors as wearing overly provocative clothes. Andrea brought up a current book that was causing much controversy called *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, which initiated an animated discussion about cultural and racial stereotypes and the challenges that racialized minorities and immigrants face in Canada, in particular women. They used the newspaper clippings, stories and photographs to express their feelings, ask questions, formulate opinions, give each other advice, and envision possibilities for taking action against injustice. Sometimes, they were silent and held back. At other times, they were surprised about issues people faced and were galvanized into action, suggesting ideas for addressing issues in their schools.

During my analysis, I noticed there were many pockets of conversation and debate that arose in between individual photo presentations and that did not necessarily relate to a particular image or to my predetermined research questions. At first, I was unsure if I should include these discussions in my analysis and initially left them aside. However, after reading
the transcripts several times and reflecting on the work of such scholars as Fine and McClelland (2008), Luttrell (2000) and Lather (1986, 2004), I realized these conversations were indeed important and revealed significant messages about the girls’ priorities and hidden discourses that might not have emerged from my research questions. However, these seeming tangents were not irrelevant to understanding the lives of girls, as I might have concluded at first. In fact, these “distractions” were central. They wove together the girls’ often unexpressed concerns with identity, peers, sexuality, gender, family, together with concepts of citizenship that dominate much of the literature about citizenship in education as well as educational curricula and policy.

Often, these digressions revealed the girls’ more genuine ideas and interests that they might not have shared when asked questions explicitly by me, as the researcher. They also revealed some important disconnects between the girls’ lived experiences and priorities and those valued in official spaces, classrooms and official curricula. In contrast with my initial conceptual framework, I came to understand that there were many layers of “findings” that arose by looking at the data in different ways and at various points in the inquiry process. When conceptualizing the relationship between these different concepts, I also drew on Joshee (2004)’s notion of a discourse web, where a complex network of discourses co-exist in policy documents, discussions and institutions, changing prominence and dominance depending on such factors as the policy climate or the government in power. This notion can also illustrate how different layers of discourses exist in the lives, discussions and perspectives of the girls in my study. As Lorenz (2010, p. 162) argues, there is no single truth. Instead, we are seeking a “deepened, complex and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic” (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 163) and examining how the girls’ civic values and interests and activities are connected to and shaped by this web of discourses related to gender, identity, schooling and citizenship.

In my analysis, I identified three different layers, or categories, that I have described as surfaced, smothered, and silenced. Because of their participation in the BIAAG club and their exposure to research, educators and policymakers related to girls’ issues, these girls might be more able than many teenagers to articulate the forces shaping their identities and participation. However, they must still live and function within the structures of society.
Their images, analyses and discussions did reveal a significant gap between their conceptualization of gender roles and their roles as Canadian citizens, which holds significant meaning for our understanding of citizenship and civic participation. By discussing the different layers of discourses, I also intend to elucidate the complex, contradictory situation they must negotiate as young, female-citizens.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

As I designed this study, I was committed to disrupting traditional research paradigms and relations of power (Lather, 1986, 1992, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Wang, 1999, 2001; 2008). It became clear to me that while there are benefits to reenvisioning research paradigms, new challenges emerged. There was no doubt that my relationship with the young women who participated in my study went beyond those emerging from a traditional survey, with me acting as a hybrid researcher-participant-mentor. Though I did not do a full narrative inquiry, I did draw on many of its principles, most notably the idea of the research process being relational and co-constructed by researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Having studied with Jean Clandinin and drawing on many of the principles of narrative inquiry, I considered very seriously my responsibility to these young people.

Over time, some of the young women in my study began to seek me out for advice and support about a range of issues in their lives including: university applications, scholarships, reference letters, and resume advice. Some of these requests were easy to fulfill. However, it became clear to me that some of the participants sought more than just technical information. They were asking for emotional support and mentoring on more personal issues, such as how to deal with conflicts with peers or teachers, and they often sought definitive and concise answers to some of life’s fundamental issues. This emerging dynamic also provoked me to critically reflect on my own role in the process and relinquish some of my own predetermined questions or plans in order to get a more accurate sense of these girls’ lives. In addition, it prompted me to also reflect on my own position of privilege, as a White, middle class researcher working with young women of color, many of whom came from families who were struggling with economic, racial and cultural inequality (Luttrell, 2000).
These moments were a testament to the trust developed in our project, I often felt ill-equipped to deal with these situations, while at the same time recognizing my dedication to these young people. Once again, I drew on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2004) notion of relational responsibility when considering how to respond to some of the more difficult requests that departed from the confines of a traditional research relationship. In part, my difficulty was related to my own personal struggles to balance self-determination and the challenging of traditional gender roles with healthy relationships with peers, men and society. I also know the difficulties that can emerge when people show leadership and attempt to push for social change, which are likely much larger when the civic leader is someone not typically associated with leadership and power, such as young women. Indeed it is not a smooth path to success, but sometimes fraught with unexpected obstacles. This dynamic not only speaks to the effects of the research process, but also to the very nature of the questions we were exploring in this study: notions of citizenship, democracy, equality and participation in the structures of society. I will discuss these findings in the following sections when I examine which discourses surfaced, which were smothered, and which were silenced altogether.
Summary of Key Themes for My Analysis:

Surfaced, Smothered And Silenced

Surfaced
1. Learning to be yourself and to be a “good girl”
   a. Meeting family expectations
2. Learning to be a “good student”: Girls, gender and schooling
   a. Space-invaders: Girls going forward, boys falling behind
3. Learning to be a “good citizen”: Girls and the nation

Smothered
1. Self-assertion versus peer acceptance: Backlash to girls’ leadership
2. Schooling as reproducer of social inequality: Critiquing the myth of universal citizenship
3. Athletics over academics: Girls’ realization of androcentrism in education
4. Performing femininity: Sexuality and self-expression
5. New forms of civic engagement

Silenced
1. Mom and me: Conflicted feelings about motherhood and the feminine
2. Responsibility over rights: What counts as civic participation?
3. Business and burnout
Surfaced Discourses

In the two previous chapters, I discussed major themes that emerged out of the girls’ conversations, photographs and analyses. Though there was debate about these topics, they did represent a group consensus about what ideas they felt were most important and I let the girls’ words stand on their own in the past chapters. I will now analyze them using my conceptual framework, describing how the “spectrum of thick desire” that characterizes their wide range of civic interests, values and desires. In addition, this discussion will situate these ideas about girls’ roles in society within a larger web of discourses in order to illustrate how dominant values shape which ideas are given more space in schooling and society, and which are marginalized. Thus, these discourses that emerged most readily in my work with these young women connect closely with the most mainstream ideas about gender roles, race, culture and Canadian identity.

Learning to Be Yourself and to Be “Good” Girl

Sugar and spice and everything nice, that’s what little girls are made of. [Children’s poem.] (Opie & Opie, 1951, p. 100)

The participants in this study were intelligent, well-rounded young women who grew up in families and communities that did not ascribe to rigid gender expectations nor strictly control their freedom. From our work together, I found that these young women must navigate a number of tensions in their various different communities. The lives of girls in general, and those in my study, are an on-going balancing act: being unique and accepted by their peers; being considered attractive without having to be sex objects; and being successful students without being alienated from their peers because of their accomplishments. This process of developing an adult sense of self, while also maintaining relationships and belonging to multiple communities is life’s work for all people. However, there are several theories that ground my understanding of the girls in my study. Though relatively recent, there is now a growing research literature, which I introduced in my discussion of theoretical foundations, that focuses on girlhood and the lives and experiences of young women (Bach, 1994; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1997, 1991; Handa, 2003; Harris, 2004; Pipher
Many scholars have begun to explore the lives of girls and young women from a range of racial cultural backgrounds, further deepening our understanding of their experiences.

As I discussed in my literature review, the dominant understanding of girls in North American society is also influenced by a growing literature emerging from the psychological field. In her ground-breaking book, *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan (1991) shattered the commonly held view of psychological development as being similar for boys and girls. From extensive work with young people, she found that males and females had different patterns of development and approached problem solving and relationships differently. In addition, she documented how young women’s self-concepts changed as their identities began to be more constructed by discourses related to women’s sexuality and they came to be recognized as sexually available, being increasingly valued for their appearance, their object-ness and their availability. In essence, she argued that girls learned to silence themselves as they approached adulthood and adopt a more supportive and subservient role to the men in their lives.

The theories that frame our understanding of girlhood illustrate how girls suffer a “crisis of self-esteem at puberty, where they go from being tough, loud and strong girls to becoming demure, quiet and self-conscious adolescents”. (Bach, 1997, p. 7). This transition is very much tied to becoming a sexual being. Much has been written about this transition from youth into adolescence and adulthood, where the pressures to be feminine, obedient and sexually attractive within the dominant heterosexual male culture acts to stifle girls’ independence and self-expression (Gilligan, 1987, 1991). The introduction into adulthood, coupled with the beginning of a sexual identity is inherently connected to our sense of self and how we view our role in the family, our school and our society. Therefore, our sexual and gender identity are related to our notion of civic and societal identity.

Some scholars have critiqued this theory, posing the question: who does not go through a crisis of self-esteem at the crossroads of puberty? (Bach, 1997, p. 7). Although this is a fair question, it is important to examine how notions of femininity and masculinity affect how girls and boys experience their transitions into adulthood. My work with these girls did
not lead me to conclude they are experiencing crises of self-esteem, but rather the increasing complexity of adult life as they are asked to cope with balancing many contradictory identities at once. Indeed, the young women in my study confirm Riviere’s (2005) claim that girls living in multicultural, urban environments can and do live with multiple, complex and sometimes contradictory self-concepts even while maintaining allegiance and a sense of belonging as active citizens of Canada. I will discuss these contradictions, tensions and disjunctions in the next section.

Despite the reality that these girls are negotiating multiple expectations and carving out their own individual paths, there is still recent evidence that they continue to be socialized in line with traditional notions of femininity so they assume the behaviours and characteristics of a “good” girl. In a similar study looking at girls and gender identity in the Netherlands, Volman and Ten Dam (1998) document this socialization process, as complex, iterative and full of ambivalence and contradiction. The “good” girl is an unattainable ideal that no-one can fully achieve, and these girls were no different. Although this ideal exists throughout the world, their experiences are shaped by the particular intersections of race, class, culture, and religion that these young women experienced (Crenshaw, 1993).

In spite of their differences, these girls acknowledged publicly that they had supportive and “laid-back” families, but they also revealed the messages they were receiving from their parents, schools and society at large about their clearly “female” or feminine roles. They described a list of very clearly demarcated behaviours, characteristics, colors, jobs, personality and physical traits that they associated with being female. In line with some research on gender role socialization (Savoie, 2005), these young women expressed how girls were expected to be more caring, loving, maternal and obedient than boys. They used such language as “obedient”, “reserved”, and “gentle”. Several of the girls expressed guilt at not helping more around the house, referring to themselves as “bad” girls for not contributing more to chores and household responsibilities. The language they used to highlight their notions of gender were surprisingly normative and dichotomous, even while they also resist and reject these ideas in their own actions. If a girl is expected to be “obedient”, “reserved” and “maternal” what implications does it have for her participation in societal structures outside the family?
In fact, Janice described how her parents assume that she’s the “good kid”, while her brother was expected to “stir up trouble”. They also identified how this socialization process begins before birth, pointing to gender stereotyping in baby clothes and toys. As Priya aptly put it: “when babies are born, baby stuff for guys is blue and pink for girls”. They mentioned such things as padded bras for small girls and Disney princesses. Thus, in line with much of the literature on gender, they clearly delineated how children were socialized into gender roles. As Pillow (2002) describes, gender is:

A construct we tend to accept as natural so that it operates hegemonically: who we are, what we expect, what we think we know is so dependent on binary categories of male and female, we often do not even think to question these categories nor do we even see them. (Pillow, 2002, p. 11)

In fact, all the girls talked about how their mothers or parents encouraged them to be successful and supported their active involvement beyond schoolwork and outside of their school environments. Most of the participants described how they were not required by their parents to take on many onerous chores and expectations within their homes. These factors were obviously significant in facilitating their active participation in their communities. Their relatively limited responsibilities within the family and their freedom of mobility stand in contrast to some other studies that focused on the lives of racialized minority youth, and in particular South Asian and Muslim youth (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Handa, 2003). These studies, which I described in my literature review, illustrated how the girls growing up in these communities were very restricted in their movements outside the home and also took on many responsibilities within the home that limited their participation in school and civic activities. These girls have families that are open-minded and generally supportive of their activism, and require little in the way of chores and contributions to their households.

**Meeting Family Expectations**

One of the largest influences on a girl’s self-concept is her family, and in particular her parents. The young women in “Project Citizen-Girl” described how their parents often give them clear messages about their roles as females, distinct from those given to their brothers. Often, they talked about how they were expected to be more compliant and
respectful of authority, affirming the argument made by other scholars that gender role socialization is alive and well in Canadian society (Bashevkin, 2009; Bickmore, 1997; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). For example, Jane compared her relationship with her parents to that of her brother’s, describing herself as more obedient. “I think my parents just always assume I'll follow directions, but with him it's always making sure he knows what he's doing. I think he's questioning his freedom more now and trying to see what he can do (to push the boundaries). Which is not always a bad thing”. She admits to being less questioning than her brother, she acknowledges that there are positive aspects to being able to question authority. Jane went on to describe how although she is a “good” girl at home and more compliant, she often likes to provoke critical conversations in her classes at school, revealing an interesting distinction between how she sees herself at home and at school.

Similarly, Janice talked about the ways that her parents reinforce gendered expectations of her and her brother in terms of their activities, actions, behaviours and roles within the home.

In my family, if you’re a female, you do your chores. My dad always lectures me about how I don’t greet his friends. I guess greeting is a part of the female roles. He encourages me to focus on my studies. I guess now they really want their children to succeed in school, even if they’re girls. They put me into violin, I guess they think that’s a womanly [activity]. They put my brother into martial arts. I guess that’s manly? He was also in soccer.

Not only are girls and women expected to take care of the home, but also to be academically successful students at school--as representatives of the family. Finally, girls are also expected to play the role of the polite family host, “greeting” guests, as Janice describes it, and welcoming them to the home. Both Janice and Jane’s experiences seem to suggest that the discourse of the “good” girl and traditional notions of femininity are more prevalent in the home than in the school environment, illustrating a further divide between the public and private spheres.

There was general agreement that there was more pressure on girls to be “perfect” and control their behavior and actions. Priya described how in Tamil culture, girls are not supposed to make direct eye contact with men and are expected to not be too direct.
Interestingly, Michelle didn’t explicitly connect her Jamaican heritage or race to her conversation about gender, while Janice talked about her parent’s expectations of her to be polite, helpful and to take on the brunt of household duties because she is a girl. However, they all talked about how they were expected to be “feminine” and place a great deal of importance on their appearance. In Jane’s words: “I think there's more of a pressure for girls to always look or behave a certain way. It's almost as if everything’s a competition to be the best, or look the best”, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or cultural background. Despite differences between the girls, this theme was raised by all of them.

Learning to be attractive and feminine to men is ironically tightly connected to sexuality and the regulation of girls’ sexuality. They are told they must make an effort to be feminine and attractive to men, while at the same time, their own curiosity about sexuality and intimacy is tightly regulated.

Michelle, Mihika and the other girls also concurred that their dating lives were more tightly regulated than boys’, especially in relation to girls’ intimate relationships and expression of sexuality, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. According to Michelle, girls were not allowed as much freedom as boys when it comes to dating. Janice described how her parents monitor her online communication with boys.

Janice: They assume I’m the good kid. They don’t really lecture me about a lot of stuff. They put more pressure on my brother because he’s the boy. My dad really wants him to succeed.

Leigh-Anne: Do you think they have different expectations of you because you’re a girl.

Janice: I guess, I’ve always been the girl who does my homework and gets the mark I want. They don’t really worry about me as long as I stay home most of the time and don’t go to a guy’s house. On MSN, we have our pictures, and if it’s a guy’s picture, they are like – who’s that? Even though girls can put guys’ pictures on your page. That’s really frustrating. They get mad at me.

Thus, a “good girl”, in Janice’s family, not only does well in school and is obedient, but also does not communicate with boys or express any interest in sex, intimacy or relationships. Despite this general consensus about gender differences, the group also
discussed some of the ways that these differing expectations were further influenced by cultural norms. Thus, though the definition of the “good girl” is shifting and shaped by multiple factors and context, including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion and culture, the notion that girls and women are viewed as the carriers of the family honour is present across cultures (Crenshaw, 1993; Riviere, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2003). One example of the ways that Priya thought her cultural background shaped her experience of girlhood. She described how her mother was concerned about her reputation within her Tamil community.

My mom brought it up the other day, actually, after I came back from Bali, I said: ‘I want to travel more.’ And she’s like, girls have to have to be more proper because of your reputation’. I’m like, ‘what, guys don’t have a reputation?’ And then she said: ‘We don’t really care what guys do, but girls, you have to be very careful.’ I guess we just come under the microscope more often. People just look at us and our actions more often than guys”.

Priya believes that the rules and restrictions on girls are stricter within her predominantly South Asian community than in mainstream Canadian society. Thus, as she begins to express an independent adult path for herself, her family reasserts traditional concepts of femininity and female roles that limit her autonomy.

In Canada, when you look someone in the eyes, it’s a sign of confidence. But girls (in my community), have been brought up to not look a guy directly in the eyes, because it’s considered improper. There are other rules for girls, like you don’t shake your legs, because that makes it look like you want something. You always have your legs down, you don’t put them up. So whenever I’m out, those are the things that I have to think about, and then … I can’t go out late at night. When I went to Bali … I was actually surprised when she said yes, but she didn’t tell any of my other aunts and uncles, because she knew that they would be [critical]. So that stereotype is there. Of course, they expect you to get married and to settle down. My cousin and I are both the same age, we’re both female, and we both feel like we don’t want to get married any time soon. They’ve set the age of 26.

Similar to Janice’s story, Priya describes how there are not only regulations on a girls’ freedom, but also the freedom of movement of her own body. She must not move her body in a way that might be construed as sexy. In addition, though she expresses a desire for travel
and adventure and self-determination, she is instead expected to assume the traditional roles of women as wife and care-taker. In effect, her agency and decision-making power is being limited. It is important to note some of the contextual factors that are affecting Priya’s story. We can see how the tension she feels between fitting in and carving out her own paths are mirrored in her mother’s behaviour as well.

Her mother wants her to get education and allowed her to go on a trip while also commenting on her activities and setting expectations of her to get married by 26. She had described previously in her participant profile how she believed that part of the disconnect between her own expectations for her life and those placed on her by her mother are due to many factors. First, she was raised in Canada, while her mother grew up in Sri Lanka. In addition, she also alluded to the fact that her mother was not allowed to complete her schooling in Sri Lanka also in part due to the unequal treatment of her Tamil people, within the dominant Sinhalese society. Priya’s independence seems temporary since her mother’s priority for her future is to get her married. In addition, Priya also recognized the amazing sacrifices that her mother made to improve her opportunities and while she was determined to set high goals for herself, she also felt disloyal if she deviated from her mother’s hopes for her.

There is a growing body of scholarship that aligns with Priya’s story. There are many Canadian scholars who are documenting issues similar to those described by Priya (Handa, 2003; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000); For example, in her book, Of Saris and Mini-Skirts, Handa (2003) describes how many South Asian girls in Canada live two separate lives, dressing and behaving one way while at home in their community and another way when out in public and in school, trying to “fit in” in their cultural community as well as in the predominantly White Canadian society. Much of what some people attribute to certain minority groups has been documented in a variety of immigrant communities, across time and nation (Sirin and Fine, 2008, 96). In particular, (Suarez-Orozco & Qin, in Sirin & Fine, 2008; p. 95) found that these gendered expectations of boys and girls have been documented across a wide range of immigrant families, regardless of racial, religious or cultural background.
One of the most consistent findings across studies in immigrant families is the different socialization strategies that parents have for their daughters and their sons…this finding cuts across nearly every ethnic background as well as across different historic periods: stricter parental control of immigrant girls has been documented in second-generation Chinese women in San Francisco in the 1920s. Italian women in the Harlem in the 1930s,…Mexican girls in the Southwest during the interwar years…etc. Similar findings are also shown amongst South Asian immigrant groups in Canada (Suarez-Orozco & Qin, 2006, p. 171).

There are significant differences in how different cultural or religious groups socialize boys and girls. However, using an intra-categorical analysis (Denis, 2008) and examining both similarities and differences within this small group of girls revealed though the gendered messaging and social controls maybe more pronounced among certain ethnic or cultural communities. These young women all described aspects of gender role socialization regardless of race or cultural background. To some degree, young people are still getting the message that “boys will be boys and girls will be girls”.

Though these girls talk about resisting the expectations placed on them by parents or society, it is also true that they have internalized many of them and no longer need explicit controls or limitations by parents because they are able to regulate themselves and their own behavior so that they do not challenge these expectations too dramatically. For example, Janice shared an observation about her relationship with her father: “I always put limitations on myself. I think they know that I have my values and I know what I’m doing. I organize myself and have a pretty strict schedule and they know where I am and they’re not worried about me”. The pressure to be the “good” girl does have significant effects on girls’ self-confidence and their relationships with their peers. “I've been pretty lucky. I know some of my friends have felt more down about themselves, and I've never really been in that situation, but like I said, I just have to remind myself and my friends, you don't have to prove yourself to anyone, and you don't owe those people anything”.

In addition to drawing clear distinctions between various cultural groups within Canada, the girls’ also discussed how the issue of gender inequality was much more severe
outside of Canada, in “other countries”, in particular less developed countries. They brought in a range of newspaper clippings and stories about how gender inequality manifests itself in other societies. Michelle brought in a story about how girls were killed in China because of a preference for boys emerging out of the one-child policy. Jane described it thusly:

In Canada, I think there's a much better balance than there is in other places. I think that there's a least some sort of equality, whereas there’s a huge gap in other places of the world where I guess you could say that stereotype has been taken to the extreme. But I think…the stereotypical person of me would put the stronger traits with the man and the more gentle traits with the woman.

This conceptualization of gender is a reflection not of the girls thinking, but rather of the ways in which gender, race, culture and nation are constructed and reproduced in schools, media and Canadian society at large. Many scholars also describe how gender is often conceptualized as only a problem “over there”, and as Jiwani (2011) states, “over there, over here”, as in within particular racialized minority communities. This kind of dichotomized thinking was very common throughout our work together, though over time, the girls seemed to develop a more nuanced and complex notion of the “gender issue”. In addition, this dichotomized thinking about gender and the good girl is similarly reflected in the ways in which the nation is conceptualized in school, which will be explored in a later section.

In addition to comparing Canada to the developing world, many of the conversations highlighted the inequalities within certain cultures and communities within Canada. Thus, in these young women’s notion of “the good girl”, girls are defined in several binaries: girls versus boys, racialized minority and immigrant girls versus “Canadian girls”; and Canadian girls versus girls “over there”. For them, school is inextricably linked to citizenship and society. It provides young people (and girls in particular) with expanded opportunities in their future lives, but also gives them various opportunities for an active expression of citizenship as young people while in school – even if they are not considered by law to be adult citizens.
Learning to Be a “Good” Student:
Girls, Gender and Schooling

There is a common belief within Canadian society, and indeed underlying all
democratic societies, that education leads to self-determination and success in life. School is
often portrayed as a means to empowerment for girls and a central way for young women to
escape the undervalued confines of the private sphere and enter the public world. The
argument is that getting an education leads girls to expand their political, social and
economic opportunities, and improve the quality of their lives (Annan, 2004; Unicef, 2012).
Globally, there is a massive push to support girls’ education in the developing world. Many
international leaders, from Hillary Clinton to Kofi Annan are making public statements,
heralding the importance of investing and supporting the education of girls around the world
(United Nations Information Service, 2004). “As Clinton declared at a UNESCO event for
girls’ education: “No society can achieve its full potential when half the population is denied
the opportunity to achieve theirs”(Clinton, 2010).

Many educators, policymakers and international agencies also connect girls’
education to a variety of health, socioeconomic and development indicators (UNICEF, 2012;
Plan Canada, 2011). For the most part, schooling is viewed un-problematically and is
connected to society in an entirely positive manner. In general, the girls in this study share a
strong, underlying belief in education as an empowering, meritocracy that represents a path
to success, self-actualization and freedom for girls and women. For them, school is
inextricably linked to citizenship and society. It provides young people, and young women in
particular, with expanded opportunities to define their own future lives, and also gives them
various opportunities for an active expression of citizenship as young people while in school.

Mihika argued that “for a girl, education is the most important thing, from my
perspective. With education, a girl can do almost anything and people will take you
seriously”. They shared several photographs of books, libraries and glasses, representing
their belief that information, education and knowledge are not only opportunities for young
people to expand their worlds, but also play a key role within their ideas about citizenship.
Macy also showed a photograph of a library and Andrea showed her glasses, claiming that:
“knowledge is my priority”. Their faith in schooling seemed to confirm other studies
showing how girls of color in the U.S. believed that education and credentials are a means for overcoming discrimination and systemic inequality based on race and gender (Weiler, 1988).

These generally optimistic young people genuinely believe that girls in Canada have incredible privilege to be able to go to school, in comparison with other girls around the world. In addition, they believe it is their civic responsibility to take advantage of this access to education. Thus, a “good student” and a “good girl” works hard, achieves in school and doesn’t critique or challenge what is learned in school and its relationship to citizenship and self-actualization. “Education and knowledge is my priority in life”, said Andrea, who goes on to explain how although schooling is ‘difficult” and “dangerous”, it is also a “means to get out” and be successful. Mihika echoes a similar sentiment, arguing that in Canada, it is a way to develop oneself and get to know one’s own skills, passions and goals in life.

Their comments reflect their seemingly unshakeable trust that schooling leads to personal development and transformation. As Dillabough (2008) claims, “within a Liberal framework, education is often viewed as the vehicle for individual self-empowerment of women and deconstructing more traditional gender roles (Dillabough, 2008, p 376)”. Again, it seemed clear from our work together that these ambitious young people shared the conviction that they could shape their own lives and futures through the successful navigation of the educational system. Several girls highlighted the importance of gathering knowledge and education, sharing several images of books, computers and libraries. Andrea said, “Education is my priority” and it is the way to success for young people, but especially for girls.

Their linking of schooling to success and individual empowerment very much aligns with other studies (Volman & Ten Dam, 1998), focusing on young people and participation. Volman and Ten Dam argue that this faith is a result of the success and pervasiveness of neo-liberal discourses in education over concepts of social critique and collective identity. According to this argument, the idea is also closely connected to the dominant narrative that gender inequality has been solved in Canada and is merely a problem in the distant past, or in developing countries, thus nullifying the need for women’s rights movements, community organizing and other forms of social movement.
If education is a part of a meritocratic society and girls are outperforming boys, then it follows, by this logic, that education must not be reproducing gender inequality. Thus, hyper focus on the individual and a meritocratic education system has not only pushed gender off the research agenda (Foster, 1999; Ringrose, 2007) but also transformed the ways that these young women are understanding and enacting citizenship and civic participation. This notion that schooling is liberatory and necessarily leads to individual empowerment is very widespread, not only among policymakers and governments, but as the girls’ comments illustrate among students. However, that the dominance of this idea perpetuates a number of dangerous assumptions that the girls do begin to challenge in our “smothered” conversations.

“Space-Invaders”:

Girls Going Forward, Boys Falling Behind

In Canada and many other countries of the Global North, the past ten years have abounded with such headlines such as “Boys Falling Behind” (Globe & Mail, 2010), “The War Against Boys” (Hoff Summers, 2000) in both the academic world as well as the public imagination. Educators are scrambling to understand “The Crisis in Boys” (Newsweek, 2008) and “How Boys are Falling Behind Girls” (The Globe & Mail, 2010) in school, often suggesting that schools are feminized environments that privilege girls (Hoff Summers, 2000). Girls have been found to consistently score better on literacy tests, as measured by PISA and other international agencies looking across countries (PISA, 2009). In the academic world, the prevailing discourse is that girls are the “success story of the 1990s” (Wilkinson, 1994). In fact, there are countless empirical studies that show how girls are doing better than boys on a range of tests across a wide array of subject areas, including traditionally male-dominated areas like science (National Post, Nov, 2011).

The young women in this project are very aware of these larger discourses about gender and student achievement and the commonly held assumption that girls are viewed as being more academically successful than boys. Their discussions clearly reflect how a variety of measures of student achievement suggest that girls are out-performing boys in a variety of ways, including literacy and numeracy tests, grades and other measures. This perspective has dominated the research agenda and has also filtered into teaching and learning and is being
passed onto students in some ways that are seriously problematic. Michelle described how this concept played out in her school.

I really think that with this whole stereotype that we are more responsible and more reliable than boys are, people end up thinking that we are smarter. If you were to ask for a tutor, you wouldn’t expect a male tutor, you’d expect a female tutor, or you’d expect the girl to be the smartest kid in class. I think that is why girls are more favoured than boys.

Michelle explained how her teacher reacted to this perception about gendered patterns in achievement. “My teacher was saying that we need to fix the statistic that girls do better than boys on the test. It shouldn’t be that girls are doing better than boys on the test, because whenever they think of a girl they think she is the smartest in the class”. Thus, her teacher believes that educators must turn their attention to helping boys, without looking at things more holistically. Michelle doesn’t really question her teacher’s assertion, but rather reports it as a matter of fact.

Foster (1997, 1999) has written extensively about the impact of girls’ growing academic achievement and the perceived “crisis among boys”. She argues that in many ways, successful girls have become “space-invaders”, threatening the foundation of traditionally male power and foundational beliefs about gender roles. She documented how the focus on girls’ academic achievement has significantly shifted our understanding of gender in schooling in Canada and the countries of the global north. She argues that the perception that girls are out-performing boys in schools has taken attention away from a more critical examination of the continued androcentrism of education. She asks the provocative question: “if girls are surpassing boys in academic achievement, how can they continue to remain as care-takers” (Foster, 1999, p. 8)? What does it mean for traditional societal roles if girls are surpassing boys? If girls are more academically successful, does it necessarily translate into expanded roles in society outside of school? Though the girls did not discuss the impact of this common perception explicitly, the ways that they referred to it raised questions about how these assumptions played out in their classrooms and families. Indeed, if girls are outperforming boys and assuming a dominant role in education, what implications does it
have for our assumptions about appropriate behavior or forms of participation for males and females?

Jane: I must say, I’m more inclined to enjoy school than my brother and they say that because he’s a boy, he, his friends and boys (in general), need to be active and move around and stuff. I mean some people think it’s just an exaggeration and I think it’s true.

Mihika: I think it’s just teenagers. I don’t think it’s because you’re a boy or a girl. You’re both going to be in need of physical exercise. But, I mean, in society, we just think that guys are just careless and they don’t think about doing well in school and care about stuff. They just care about having fun.

Andrea: In my school, the top students are just nerdy and they’re pretty equal and stuff, you have your fair share of boys and girls. But if you look at the goofy ones and stuff, in class, the class clowns tend to be guys.

Michelle: I take a class about hair and aesthetics, and they’re all girls except a couple of guys. The ones who make the most noise are the girls and I guess the guys don’t want to say anything because it’s a girl class and I guess they don’t want to be considered gay. The more academic classes, the more girls I find in those classes.

We can see from the previous passage that although the girls are expressing a range of views, most seem to conclude that there are important differences between how boys and girls act in school and relate to their school environment. In addition, their stories also show how girls (and boys) are lumped into one group, ignoring how race, culture, class and other identity factors might reveal significant intra-group differences.

Furthermore, there is no mention of the gendered nature of curricula or schooling, a fact that is now well documented (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Bickmore, 1997), nor is there a more holistic examination about how notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed and reproduced in schooling. Indeed, a growing number of scholars such as Ringrose (2007), Foster (1999, 1997) and Gordon (2000) argue that the dominant view that girls are outperforming boys is ignoring the continuation of sexist schooling and often distracting the focus from a more critical examination of gender and schooling and its effects on young
people. Where is the outrage about the continued under-representation of women’s lives in school curricula, in political structures and government?

There is an emerging body of research that explores gender in education in a more holistic or comprehensive fashion. On one hand, there are studies examining the science of brain function in boys and girls and exploring cognitive differences at a “scientific” lens, highlighting biological and genetic differences between males and females (Martino, 2008). However, Sadker and Sadker (1994) conducted a thorough review of this new scientific literature and found that despite the differences between the sexes, there were more intra-group variations within the categories of boys and girls, rather than between them. This finding suggests the importance of taking an intersectional approach that explores how other factors impact these differences. Other studies have also confirmed the idea that there is more variance within the category of boys and girls, dispelling the widespread assumption that boys are failing in schools, while girls forge ahead academically.

Contrary to this notion, Martino (2011) argued that it is important to critically examine this claim, concluding that once again, there is great variety within the categories of male and female. His research suggests that in fact, there are some boys who are succeeding and others who are struggling. In addition, he argues that there are many areas, including science and technology, where girls are still lagging behind in academic success. This is a significant issue if a myriad of jobs in the future will be in the areas of science and technology and girls may not be adequately represented in these areas. Still other scholars (McCready, 2010; Reay, 2011) document how various discourses of masculinity and femininity exist within different groups of boys and girls and affect their ideas and performing of gender identity.

In addition, their conversations about “good students” in schools provoke serious questions about the implications of this discourse. For instance, how do boys engage with this idea that girls are better students and what happens to girls who are struggling academically or are less confident and might not fit this dominant idea? What are the consequences of always being expected to be academically successful? Finally, if this discourse of girls’ over-achievement is so widespread, how does it affect the ways that
teachers, researchers and policymakers read and address the longstanding gender inequalities and bias already shown to exist in schooling and curricula - or do they?

“Good” Citizen:  
Girls and the Nation

The seven girls in this study have developed a highly complex, global and sometimes contradictory concept of citizenship that reflects not only their membership in the nation of Canada and their local context in the GTA, but also their family’s transnational and dynamic lives. In addition, their ideas about what it means to be a “good” citizen reflect many of the dominant models of citizenship (Mclaughlin, 1999; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), ranging from the more minimalist, or “passive” citizen, who votes and follows laws, to the more critically minded, social justice (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). citizen who advocates for social transformation. In addition, their notions about citizen action range from being lawful and patriotic, what Andreotti (2006) might call soft citizenship, to more radical activist work, such as “bust-casting” and “V-girls” book clubs.

In many ways, their ideas about citizenship and the “good” citizen align closely with dominant views of Canadian identity and citizenship. Canada, in their view is a multicultural nation that incorporates and celebrates its mixed cultural and racial heritage, that values social equality, health care and education for all of its citizens. In addition, Canada plays a unique role in the world, in Janice’s words, as a “team player” that is a peacekeeping nation that also places a high importance on protecting the natural world. As Andrea also suggested, citizenship in Canada is a “two-way street” and that it is up to individuals to recognize and take advantage of the many privileges and opportunities granted to them as Canadians and find ways to give back to their country.

Further, however, as Preston et al. (2006) suggest, these girls describe how they negotiate a sense of citizenship and of being a “good” citizen within a system that is ultimately developed in the image of men. Thus, for these girls, as with all women, suggests Preston and others (Stasiulis, 1997; Foster, 1997, 1999; Pateman, 1988), citizenship and civic participation is by definition “negotiated and partial, influences not only by the political, social, cultural and economic context, but by the immediate concerns of the family (Yuval-
Davis, 1997, p 5). Thus, participation and membership cannot be understood separately from their participation in a family unit, met through the fulfillment of highly gendered and normative family roles – that inform wider civic participation (Preston et al. p. 1637).

**Conclusion**

Thus, there is a strong connection between being a “good” girl, a “good” student and a “good” citizen. As the girls’ discussion and photos illustrated, the individual should not only be studious and academically successful, but actively engaged in school and the larger society. This focus on being an active citizen appeared throughout our work. The messages passed on through schooling about how to enact these ideals are closely tied to ideals of Canadian multiculturalism and a celebration of cultural, racial and ethnic diversity as key to the Canadian national identity. The girls frequently mentioned the importance of valuing cultural differences, sharing your own culture with others as well as taking an interest in learning about other people’s different cultures.

The ideas discussed by the girls seem to align closely with core “Liberal” Canadian values of multiculturalism, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, the importance of cultural minority groups retaining their heritage cultures, peacekeeping, democracy, and care of the environment. In addition, the girls’ concepts of citizenship and participation are very much aligned with the current push in Ontario’s schools about active citizenship (Civics, etc). These concepts often define Canada in relation to the United States, “other countries” (developing countries) and of course in relation to the cultural heritages of their parents and families.

In this section, I have discussed how this group of young, active and engaged women developed consensus on a number of themes and issues in their lives, as they learn how to define their identities as girls, students, friends, and citizens. In addition, these surfaced discourses expose how their lived experiences of being females are also shaped by the intersection of a number of important factors, including their location, their cultural or ethnic background, their religion, their class and their race. Though these girls explicitly express confidence in society as meritocratic and in school as a means to empowerment, social
mobility and gender equality, further analysis revealed significant tensions between these beliefs and more critical ideas that they felt hesitant to express. Further, these young women also showed a sense of agency, a faith that their actions and ideas can resist dominant ideals about gender, race and citizenship. In addition, the next section will examine these tensions, dis-junctures and discourses that are “smothered” by dominant values of citizenship, gender and Canadian identity.

“Smothered” Voices

Introduction

In my analysis, it became clear to me that the pockets of conversation that emerged in between presentations, or that were initiated by girls in our “table topics” discussions at the beginning of each meeting held significant findings. Though not obviously connected to these girls’ ideas about civic participation, these conversations seemed to signal what I have described as “smothered” discourses, those that were in fact central to the girls’ experiences and ideas about their citizenship roles and yet not as socially sanctioned by dominant ideas about girlhood, identity and citizenship. In this section, I will discuss these smothered discourses and the dis-junctures they reveal in the girls’ perspectives of gender, citizenship and schooling.

These ‘whirlpools’ of data carried great energy, emotion and critique, revealing deep desires, intellectual analyses and passionate interests. In many ways, they also highlighted a gap between what I expected as the researcher and what the girls wanted to discuss. They exposed their complex and sometimes contradictory position as girl-citizens: constructed as objects, citizens and agents of social change simultaneously.

While these young women indeed have a sense of their own agency and abilities, they are also individuals that exist within a network of powerful institutions, discourses and forces as young, female, girl-students, many of whom are also experiencing other layers of marginalization based on such factors as race, class, cultural background. Finney (2007) paraphrases Valerie Walkerdine (1991), by describing the relationship of girls and young women to powerful societal structures thusly: “the voices of the oppressed are not simply left
out of the system. Rather, it regulates what a child is and children of outsider groups, and all girls, respond in a number of contradictory ways”

Therefore, it is essential to explore how issues of power play out within these contexts and relate to issues of race, class, gender and nationality. As Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1997, p. 572) have reminded us, part of feminist research is not totally validating or taking for granted women’s experiences, but also challenging them and making explicit the complex interactions of forces that shape their lives and perspectives (McClelland & Fine, 2008, p. 241). In order to peer beneath the external layer and uncover those issues that are smothered by powerful forces and reinforced by families, schools, society, James Scott (1990) argues that we must pay attention to inconsistencies, omissions, disjunctions and contradictions in order to uncover how power, context and the authority of the researcher might privilege certain concepts while disguising others.

In addition to looking at some of the contradictions within the girls’ discussions, I also explored the seeming tangents of open, unstructured conversations that they initiated and directed outside the confines of my protocols. Perhaps, these themes were also difficult to address in front of each other or in front of me, as an older person in a position of authority. McClelland and Fine (2008, p. 241) talk about “methodological release points” – points where critical/feminist scholars can map, interrupt the political smothering, commercial seduction and discursive moralizing that surround young women’s sexual desires” (McClelland & Fine, 2008, p. 242). I found these release points happened when I wasn’t directing the agenda and the girls talked naturally and unselfconsciously about issues that really mattered to them. Looking at these release points helped me identify gaps between what the girls thought I wanted to hear, and what they were organically drawn to, what I have called those discourses that are smothered by power, authority and societal norms of gender.

**Self-Assertion Versus Peer Acceptance:**

**Backlash to Girls’ Leadership**

Beyond the stories of citizenship and gender that are easily shared, there were a number of significant discourses just beneath the surface. At first, the girls provided an array of answers that they thought I might be looking for as some representative of authority. For
example, they defined citizenship mostly in terms of patriotism, flags and multiculturalism. However, it became clear that they girls, like myself, were struggling to navigate the complexity of gender relations within an overlay of pressures from family, school, culture and society. They were trying to negotiate a comfortable space between fitting into their peer groups and being recognized for their activism or volunteer work. In addition, they were negotiating a space between being accepted into their families and society according to traditional gendered norms, while also carving out their own identity in resistance to these expectations.

I had seen a photograph of Janice and her friends at a fundraising booth at school and complimented her on being able to organize both girls and boys to participate. She asked for my advice. One of her close friends, who was male, had begun to make jokes about the club and Janice’s work in initiating and organizing the activities. She was unsure of what to do to address this boy’s disruptive behavior, so I opened the conversation to the group for their suggestions. The group all expressed support and empathy for Janice and told her she should kick out the disruptive boys.

Throughout our meetings, the girls began to talk about how many boys at their respective schools had made jokes about their activism. According to the girls, few boys participated in clubs, activities and volunteer work. Janice talked about what happened when one boy joined the Because I am a Girl club at her school. The rest of the students ridiculed and made fun of this boy by labeling him as “gay”, which prompted the boy to stop attending the club. The girls also reported how they had witnessed many examples of this kind of homophobic bullying described in this story, exposing how dominant ideas of masculinity are reinforced by other young people. The students devalued the girls’ activism and leadership and at the same time, excused it as acceptable for girls, but not for boys. Thus, boys who are doing social justice work or who fight for gender equality are viewed as not masculine.

Does a “good” girl stand up to someone who is disrespecting her? Can a “good” student speak out at school if another student or teacher make a comment that is sexist, racist or homophobic, and if so, how? In effect, these smothered conversations reveal a tension
between that the girls are learning about being a “good” girl and their strong desires to become leaders to address problems and inequality in their families, schools and communities. This finding affirms much of the feminist literature that critiques citizenship learning by arguing that despite claims to educate all citizens for active participation, girls and boys still get different messages about their gender roles, socializing women into secondary roles (Arnot & Dillabough, 2007; Bashevkin, 2009; Lister, 1997). In effect, the young women in Project Citizen-Girl are developing self-confidence and self-efficacy to become agents of change, while they are also bumping up against the hard structures of society within which they must exist, structures that hold power and may limit their ability to make change. It is one thing for a girl and young woman to do well on a test or get a higher grade, but it is another if she does something to challenge the status quo by organizing a school event for gender equality.

Janice was asking for advice about how to deal with this male friend, trying to balance her desire to be friends and not “rock the boat”, while at the same time, assert herself and not be disrespected. This dilemma of balancing self-assertion with a need for peer acceptance and approval was quite common in our conversations, though not explicitly. In addition, within the group, their levels of comfort and self-confidence ranged quite widely, from the shyer, less critical girls, to those who expressed opinions freely and sometimes stridently without fear of reaction. In particular, though Mihika was the youngest participant, she appeared to feel more comfortable asserting herself, expressing opinions that might be unpopular or appear radical to her peers. On the other hand, Michelle was much less comfortable speaking up for herself and appearing disagreeable.

I share this example to illustrate how these young women are trying to define their identities while maintaining positive relationships with their peers as they begin to exercise leadership and further develop their civic roles. They are realizing that the path is not glory and accolades alone, but is also fraught with unanticipated challenges. While some people celebrate your accomplishments, others may be jealous and petty, reacting in unexpected ways. These challenges do not only come from young people, but also from teachers and parents as well.
At another point in the study, Macy approached me for advice about a situation with an adult mentor as well. Macy, an ambitious young person, had expressed concern that her public school was not preparing her enough for university and was recommending that she take lower level classes. She wanted to get a scholarship to attend a more competitive private boarding school away from her neighbourhood. When she told an adult mentor about it and asked for her help with the application, this woman reacted strongly, telling her that she “betrayed” her. Bewildered, Macy was aghast and came to me for advice on how to handle this situation. She said that she believed that this woman was reacting from her own hurt feelings and was being unfair to her. Again, this example is to illustrate some of the tensions these girls were facing as they began to take more assertive action to change the course of their lives and be more proactive. The backlash comes not only from teenagers, but also adults such as mentors and teachers, as in this example.

In part, these stories show the complex nature of girls’ exercising leadership and the kind of backlash that can come as they begin to distinguish themselves. It is not always easy to stand out in such obvious ways as a teenager and defy expectations of girls. In addition, their leadership also can create jealousy and fear in others. In many ways, an outspoken activist leader who happens to be a young woman of color defies many norms or stereotypes related to civic leadership. Even the girls in this study describe their tensions in going against many of the norms and expectations they themselves cite as being associated with femininity and women. In some ways, they are illustrating what Foster (1997, 1999) calls the phenomenon of girls being “space-invaders”, where girls’ academic success can breed conflict because they threaten male dominance in schooling. Similarly, the civic activities and leadership that these girls are demonstrating threatens historic male dominance and the traditional gender order, making them “space-invaders”, outside of school, in communities and civic organizations. These examples seem also to relate closely to Foster (1997, 2000) claim that girl’s self-assertion, leadership and achievement poses a threat to traditionally male dominance of educational achievement. In the case of the Citizen-Girls, not only are they outperforming boys in classes and on literacy tests, but these girls are also receiving accolades and acknowledgement for their leadership in their schools and communities.
Schooling as Reproducer of Social Inequality:
Critiquing the Myth of Universal Citizenship

The idea that young women are in a contradictory relationship with schooling as a preparation for citizenship has been well documented by many scholars (Alarcon, Kaplan & Maollem, 1999; Bernard-Powers, 2008; Bickmore, 1997; Foster, 1996, 2000; Hahn, 1998; Lister, 1997;). The participants in Project Citizen-Girl are no different. At the beginning of our work together, the young women in this study did not want to offer critiques of their school experiences, nor did they mention gaps in their school curricula, pertaining to the representation of gender, race or cultural differences. In general, the girls were positive about their school experiences and did not talk explicitly about experiencing any sexism or gender bias in their education. In fact, some girls, like Michelle even believed the dominant narrative that schooling favours girls, leading to girls doing better than boys in schools. However, there soon emerged a significant disjuncture between what they said when asked explicitly about gender bias in schools, and what they revealed inadvertently when discussing other topics. In spite of the idea of the alpha girls (Kindlon, 2009) and the super-students, Foster (1996b) strongly argues that: “girls remain adjuncts to the male learner-citizen, a problem which is not addressed in current models of citizenship education. The two trends are contradictory, positioning girls within a dialectic of desire and threat in their quests for citizenship” (Foster, 1996b, p. 1).

Recognizing the difficulty of critiquing an education system that they viewed in many ways as their key to social mobility, I asked them explicitly if they had learned about social movements in Canada, mentioning in particular women’s, civil rights and gay rights movements as examples. Upon reflecting on these questions, the group began to contradict their earlier statements about the egalitarian nature of their school experiences. In a sense, they began to recognize the discrepancy between what they had learned about citizenship and Canadian identity, which promises equal access to the systems of society to all citizens, and the reality of the ways that schooling privileges certain people in Canadian history and society, while marginalizing others. This gap between the discussions that surfaced easily and those that they had when pushed to think more critically likely also reflects the
difference between the official curriculum and that which the girls actually experienced first-hand.

These young women did reveal a number of examples of how messages were passed on through education about gender, race or culture. For example, Michelle described her education as “Very one-sided. We learn a lot about Canadian history, but mainly about men. Nothing much about the contribution of Blacks or Asians. Not even posters. Only Whites”. Similarly, Macy, who also goes to a more homogenous, suburban school similar to Michelle, when asked of she had learned anything about social movements for gender or racial equality, simply said: “No, not at all. I think it’s because our school is so small compared to other Toronto schools and not diverse, it’s hard to recognize everything, and if something sticks out, it sticks out a lot. We haven’t really been around long enough to see big changes”. Both Macy and Michelle attribute this limited coverage of social movements and the contributions of women and racialized minorities in Canada in part to the fact that their schools are in predominantly Caucasian areas. They believe that if there were more culturally and racially diverse student bodies in their schools, as with the other girls, that they would have learned more about cultural diversity, feminism or movements for racial equality.

“No. Nothing”. This exclusion is not new, Bernard-Powers (2008), Crocco (2010) and Lister (1997) found that history and current activities of various social justice movements is still given superficial coverage in formal citizenship and civic education curricula. When I asked Macy if she learned about the suffragette movement in Canada and the “Person’s case”, she replied emphatically no, adding: “We definitely should, but the history teacher that I had was a guy and he was not willing to discuss that. We did learn about the Japanese Prisoner of War Camps here, and we learned about the Residential Schools, but nothing with women, in particular, unfortunately.” In general, the girls argued that in reality, their curriculum mostly reflected the contributions of White men, with a few token women and people of color.

There was a consensus within the group that there were three main spaces where they had overtly studied and discussed the lives of women to Canada. These included settler times, suffragettes and sex education. These limited conversations about gender raises the
question as to what messages young people will take from this representation of gender and women’s roles in the family, society and citizenship structures. If the only context for studying women and their roles in society is when discussing reproduction and their past fight to be declared “persons” and citizens in society, it likely sends young people a clear message about the places that men and women occupy in our society.

Jane described how the women’s movement “has probably been coming up more recently; we've been, in history we talked about it, I mean it was just covering it as part of the chapter but with suffragettes and stuff like that. It's not been completely looked into, but it's not been completely overlooked at the same time.” However, in her next answer, she admits that it was covered in a marginal way.

I mean, I think that the most we did was a tiny bit about Nelly McClung and Emily Murphy. But that was just as a part of, I think, it was in history this year, but it was a part of changing Canada or something. But it wasn't like changing women's rights; it was how Canada was changing as a country.

Jane’s realization was confirmed by the other girls: the one and only consistent contribution or event that the girls reported learning about throughout their entire education that examined the role of women in society was the “famous five” and the women’s suffragette movement in Canadian history. These findings confirm other studies (Foster, 1996, Hahn, 1998) that illustrate how curricula actually gives girls and boys different messages about their expected roles and behaviours, while promising equality.

Most of the girls did not mention any other spaces where they were asked to critically examine ideas about gender or sex roles or ideas about masculinity and femininity. There were some differences between the girls’ school experiences about gender. Andrea said that in her school, they had talked about women, but in particular ways.

Leigh-Anne: Did you learn about feminism and the women’s movement in Canada?

Andrea: Oh yeah, in history. I think our teacher actually emphasized it, even though he was male. He put emphasis on it.
Leigh-Anne: And what about in your other classes?

Andrea: Yes, we did. We talked about gender issues. We talked about, really in the context of other countries, I guess you could say left people to kind of make their own conclusions about Canada. But we just talked about sexual slavery, human trafficking. All those issues that prevail in other parts of the world, but you could only talk about things in Canada, and actually did my project on sexual slavery and it opened my eyes to prostitution in Canada and the United States, particularly. But we didn’t talk about those issues regarding Canada.

Andrea: Not really. I don’t really think … some classes they can’t. Like math, they couldn’t do that. The only class was that sex education class that I had in Grade 9, they put a lot of emphasis, because it was a girl class. They had to. But really, it was the history class.

Both Andrea and Michelle said that they talked about women explicitly in their sex education classes, “because it was a girls-only class”. Michelle went on to explain that her teacher talked about the Person’s Case and the push for women’s recognition as citizens “even though he was male”. He put emphasis on it.” In other words, it was acceptable to learn about women in a single sex class for women, but not necessarily for all students or subject areas. Thus, learning about gender and women’s roles in society were not portrayed as key to one’s understanding of Canadian citizenship and civic participation.

This discussion reveals the important distinction between access, equality and equity. While the majority of teachers, Furthermore, as the group talked, they began to acknowledge that in their experience, history, as it has been taught to them, was really his-story: a long line of the contributions of men at the expense of a more critical examination of the roles of all citizens. Mihika described it thusly:

Every time we learn about…even in science and other topics, we learn about poets, artists, whoever it is it’s always a male person, just because they are recognized more. So like for art, it’s the obvious, Andy Warhol, Leonardo da Vinci. I never hear about female painters and artists, and it’s sad. We know that females are capable of being scientists and being amazing artists and poets and stuff, but we just don’t recognize them, and the more that we don’t recognize them, the more other people don’t recognize them, the more they
are disregarded. But, yeah, with every subject that I learn, I just wish they would bring up more examples from females, as well.

The contradiction in their answers and emerged as they began to talk more in detail about their own experiences of learning about Canadian history and society. Once again, Andrea described this construction of curriculum:

It's hard to have that representation and contribution of women and other minorities, just because like, most of the stuff we learned in Science was a couple of 100 years ago and other things are not really recognized. Instead, like, one of the only females in science is Marie Curie, who is so important to me. It's because she's one of like, the only women figures in science I can look up too. And, in terms of history, we did talk about, we talked about the, for example, we talked about people of color and, for example Gandhi. But, you know how in the United States, the issues that they represented were either issues about the fact that they are of color, or they're in another country all together. Like, you don't see any colored people being (included)... other than for...

Leigh-Anne: for civil rights.

Andrea: Yeah. The fact that they are colored.

Leigh-Anne: Right. Or women for women’s rights.

Andrea: Yeah, exactly. Like you don't really see like women for homophobia, the issues don't really inter-connect.

From this interview, we can see that Andrea recognizes the myriad of ways that history and citizenship education portrays the roles and relationships between men and women and the intersections of race and gender within Canadian society and school curricula. Andrea was able to identify the “othering” of gender inequality as a problem “over there”, confirming what other scholars have argued is a kind of neo-colonial framing of gender within a North American context (Eidoo et al., 2011; Jiwani, 2006; Razack, Smith & Thobani, 2010; Sensoy & Marshall, 2010). Not only does she identify the way that the participation of certain groups are marginalized, but she also identifies the fact that the study of these groups are not constructed as relevant to the mainstream conceptualization of Canadian identity and
citizenship. Janice added another dimension to this discussion by admitting that although she learned about the women’s movements, she knew it was unimportant because her class was not tested on it formally. She obviously picked up on how different kinds of knowledge are constructed, valued, and reproduced by mechanisms such as testing and assessment.

The marginalization of the contributions of women is successfully smothered by the idea that education empowers all citizens equally to participate equally in a meritocratic, democratic society in Canada. There have also been decades of research that confirm the observations of these seven girls, illustrating how education in Canada and the North American context continues to replicate social inequality based on race and gender, and reinforce androcentrism (Sadker & Sadker, 1980, 1994, Bickmore, 1997; Savoie, 2005; Gaskell et al., 1989; Sankofa, 2004). Many studies show how despite the now widespread assumption that schools are a feminized environment, they continue to reflect androcentric beliefs and principles that reproduce gender inequality by privileging men’s contributions to society, history and social studies, while simultaneously devaluing the contributions of women. Scholars have documented this persistent gender bias in official curricula (Bickmore, 1997), and classroom teaching and learning (American Association of University Women, 1992; Gilligan, 19991, 1997; Lyins & Hanmer, 1990; Holmes & Silverman, 1992). In fact, Griffiths and Smith (1987) argued that schooling and schools are organized and founded on the unacknowledged and devalued work of women (as teachers and mothers) (Lutrell, 2000, p. 514).

Thus, the participants began to identify the “smothering” of women’s participation in society through the marginalization within school curricula and classroom discussions. This discrepancy was not lost on these girls. This marginalization of women’s roles has been well documented by many other scholars in Canada and elsewhere (Sadker & Sadker, Bickmore, 1997; Hahn, 1998; Foster, 2000). In a 5 nation study, Hahn (1998) illustrated how women’s roles were relegated to the margins of formal education, and gender inequality and the need for social justice movements were portrayed as a problem in the distant past and within the developing world. As Andrea so aptly put in:

I think, in that class, you see the past that women have had but you don’t see the present of women. The things that they are doing right now to kind of
move society forward, and I was kind of able to...I guess because I was interested in it, I was able to make inferences, search things out and find out more about Canadian society, or make more notice of it, I guess you can say, while most people just go around living their lives because Canada...for people that really don’t want to look hard, it seems like a pretty ideal society.

In addition, the girls describe how gender inequality is constructed not only as a problem in the past, but also as a problem “over there”, as Jiwani (2010) described it. The girls learned about sex slavery, human trafficking, the one child policy in China and other issues in the global south. Again, Andrea described it well:

We talked about gender issues. We talked about, really in the context of other countries, I guess you could say left people to kind of make their own conclusions about Canada. But we just talked about sexual slavery, human trafficking. All those issues that prevail in other parts of the world, but you could only talk about things in Canada, and actually did my project on sexual slavery and it opened my eyes to prostitution in Canada and the United States, particularly. But we didn’t talk about those issues regarding Canada.

Thus, Andrea recognized how their critical examination of gender inequality is portrayed in a kind of binary, comparing Canada favourably to the rest of the world. This construction of inequality as a problem elsewhere but not in Canada is, argues Sirin and Fine (2011) key to perpetuating the notion that Canadian education and indeed, Canadian society at large is a meritocracy that provides equal access and opportunity to all of its citizens, regardless of identity, location or context.

The group talked about how some teachers and fellow students still believed in long-held beliefs about the inherent capacities of males and females. For example, the girls described several examples of how teachers or other students still believe that girls are not as strong in math and science as boys.

Leigh-Anne: Jane said she thinks there is no divide academically, what are your experiences?

Andrea: Academically, I feel a divide between boys and girls.
Priya: Me too.

Andrea: Especially in Physics, all the guys are just huddled together solving problems and I would ask them and would try to help them. They wouldn’t listen to me. It was stupid. I said, guys, I got the answer, and tried to help them but they wouldn’t listen.

Priya: I took high-level math. We had four girls and eight guys. It became like a competition. At the end, all the girls had higher averages than guys and we saw the divide. They guys got really competitive. You hear the comments about how guys are supposed to be smart at math and girls aren’t supposed to do math and physics.

Perhaps by saying that girls are not supposed to be good at math and science, the boys are not only reaffirming their underlying belief in inherent biological capacities related to sex, but also reflecting a fact that their assumed dominance of those subject areas is threatened by girls’ achievement. This perceived threat is also connected to the growing narrative that girls are outperforming boys in schools, and is connected to the shifting notion of the “good girl” and the contradictory positioning of girls in relation to schooling and citizenship.

Priya shared several stories about a high school calculus teacher, who told the girls in his classes that they should avoid math and science because they are not really well-suited to them. Priya expressed her irritation with this teacher and the other girls reacted strongly, often referring to him in their conversations as a villain. Once again, their discussions also revealed how cultural factors affected how they defined themselves in relation to their cultural and ethnic communities, as well as the nation.

Priya: My Calculus teacher called me coconut, like brown on the outside, White on the inside.

Mihika: My family calls me that. Everyone calls me that.

Leigh-Anne: I do not like those terms.

Priya: I accepted it. I was not like other brown girls. I did not watch Bollywood movies, I didn’t swoon over Bollywood stars, I didn’t even know their names. So, I didn’t do any of that. I was actually very lucky because I found my best friend in high school, she’s not Tamil but she’s Indian and
she’s different. She lived in Mauritius, so she’s French. We were more into the tv here but at the same time, we accepted where we came from. I never had many Tamil friends. There was a group at my school called KB-pants. It is all their initials.

Mihika: There was a group of guys and they called themselves the Tiger boys.

Priya: I was friends with all of them individually, but I never tried to get into the group. I never felt the need. They got a lot of attention from the Tamil guys, obviously. I never was kind of that mindset. I saw myself as my own person.

There we can see that Priya, both accepts the labels placed on her by her teacher, and ignores it at the same time. Though she does not speak back to her teacher, it seems that it is not out of fear, but rather because she has a strong sense of self. She and Mihika see a kind of strength and freedom in being slightly outside of their cultural community, without entirely rejecting them. In many ways, these girls are like “border-dwellers” (Anzaldua, 1987), living in between and across different groups and ideas, embracing contradictions and finding belonging in various communities. Once again, this passage shows the difficult contradictory expectations placed on these young women. Even while they were generally positive, there were nuances between them and they also simultaneously pointed out several ways that schooling reinforced differences between boys and girls and traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. Despite the fact that most girls had favourable experiences in school, they did explore many of the ways that schools reinforce inequalities based on gender, race, culture, ability sexuality, and much less so class or socioeconomic status.

**Athletics Over Academics:**

**Girls’ Realization of Androcentrism in Education**

The representation and gender role socialization in schooling is not always as obvious as outright gender bias in curricula or sexist comments made by teachers. It seems from their conversations that some of the most rigid reproduction of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity takes place related to athletics and physical education. Jane explained what she saw as a gender divide by explaining how many boys still assume that girls are not
athletic, and many girls think they need to fake incompetence in order to be feminine and viewed as attractive to males.

In schools there is a strange gender divide. Everyone knows the gym class divide, boys don’t want to pass to girls. I’m pretty athletic and I enjoy doing sports. Last year we had single sex gym class, and the dynamic was so different. You could do what you want, you didn’t have to be afraid of performing or being judged. At the same time in academics, I don’t really see the divide as much.

The other girls also seemed to confirm this kind of divide, describing how some girls in their schools pretend to not be athletic around the boys. Mihika shared her strong opinion about these girls’ behavior: “I (know) girls who make themselves seem like they’re not athletic at all because they want to impress the guys and there are others who want to seem more athletic. It’s ridiculous”.

The young women in this study identify how traditional notions of femininity and masculinity play out in schools, though they describe how they resist them or redefine them. Another interesting discourse that emerged was the notion that schools placed excessive value on athletics, excusing athletic students from class or assignments or even often excusing male students for bad behavior because of athletic success. Though I did not specifically ask questions related to this phenomenon, it continuously resurfaced in the girls’ photos and conversations.

The participants talked about many of the special privileges that athletic students received in schooling. Jane talked about how many of the students who were on sports teams are frequently excused from class for practice or games. Several of the girls validated this statement and expressed their frustration about what they viewed as a “stupid” double standard. Mihika shared a story of a girl at her school who sent a naked video of herself to her boyfriend, who is a very competitive athlete at her school. “She sent it to this boyfriend and he is seriously a creep. I don’t know him but I’ve been talking to people about him. Basically, he sexually harassed three girls but he travelled the world to play basketball”. Then, Jane retorted: “You can’t ruin your star”. In this case, the boy is fulfilling societal
expectations of him being masculine, athletic and aggressive, while the girls are acting as objects of his sexual desire, competing for his attention.

It appears that nothing was done to address the situation between this boy and his toxic relationship with the girls in his school, reaffirming the idea raised by a recent report on girls by the Girls Action Foundation (2001) that “society approves of girls being girls and boys being boys”.

Figure 54. Jane’s brother playing hockey.

In addition, although Jane’s comment is flippant and sarcastic, their conversations revealed a strong critique of the overvaluation of athletics over academics.

Jane: It’s quite an academic school but they also try to pride themselves on sports. They don’t want you to miss school, but the second you have a game, you can get out of class. Sometimes, they will give us an early dismissal when there are lots of sports games because they know a lot of people will be away.

Leigh-Anne: What do you think of that?

Mihika: It’s ridiculous!

Janice: I think they should separate sports and academics. There are people in my class that have missed half the year because they’re so involved in sports.
Jane: But, the second your grades start slipping, you can’t be doing this anymore. They’re trying to keep up a reputation., it’s all about keeping up with St John’s or Cambridge Prep or The Elizabeth School. Some people join the easier sports teams just to get out of class. Or they’re sports managers, they just carry water bottles.

Priya: our school is not allowed to do that.

Andrea: They do not care about their subject, as soon as they coach their team, they’re like go!

These girls are expressing their disappointment in the authority of teachers and administrators who continue to perpetuate these attitudes. They do not explore in depth the causes of this treatment of athletics and academics, but it is clear from their comments that they feel it is deeply unfair and that they believe schools make apologies for boys’ bad behavior because their sports skills are given great value. Although they might not articulate it explicitly, they seem to be critiquing the overvaluation of athletic and traditional notions of masculinity. Mihika’s story of the athlete who is sexually harassing girls without intervention is a concrete example of how the “boys will be boys” attitude continues to play out in schools currently and give permission to peers and teachers to make excuses for criminal behavior and prevents adults from acting to protect girls and women. Again, these stories reveal some of the less obvious differences in how male and female roles are valued differently within the public sphere.

Performing Femininity:
Sexuality and Self-Expression

These seven young women are aware of the contrast between their own needs, curiosities and desires related to their own sexuality and the dominant messages they receive from parents, schools and the media. Indeed, these desires did not emerge readily and explicitly in their photos and our more structured conversations: they were “smothered”, hidden by the network of messages about what they should care about. Initially, I had not

10 These are pseudonyms of well-known, elite private schools in the GTA.
planned to ask explicitly about their ideas about sexuality or intimacy. Additionally, I was unsure of how to theorize the relationship between sexuality and citizenship, and our construction as sexual beings and citizens. In pockets of spontaneous conversation, when the girls were chatting at the beginning of our meetings or in breaks between photo presentations, their desires emerged, revealing their desire to talk about sex, relationships, pleasure, pornography, and intimacy. This finding raised serious questions for me including: How do girls and young women make sense of these mixed messages between the sexual objectification of females in the mass media and the “don’t get pregnant”, and “good girls are prudes” messages from their parents and teachers? What is the connection between their notions of themselves as sexual beings and the ways in which they view their participation in civic and political life?

As McClelland and Fine (2008) describe, the “missing discourse of desire has been well documented” (Allen, 2004a, 2004b). They describe how layers of discourse instruct girls and women to be “ashamed, guilty, provocative, hot, dissociated or regretful about their sexuality” (McClelland & Fine, 2008, p. 232). With the girls in my study, the societal expectations of girls initially obscured their interest to talk about relationships, power, intimacy, and sex. After building rapport and trust within the group, their curiosities emerged through layers of discursive obfuscation. When I asked the group to brainstorm characteristics, jobs and traits, they associated with masculinity and femininity, the girl wrote the word “pervert” on a post-it and placed it in between male and female. When I asked her to explain it she said that she felt like she and her friend were “perverts” because of their curiosity about sex, intimacy, pornography, erotica and sexually-themed comics and movies. “Good” girls are not interested in sexuality. It seems that in her mind, it is their admission of interest in sexuality that makes her a “pervert”, giving her the position of a self-determining individual with agency, as opposed to merely being the an object of men’s desires. She went on to explain that this dominant view is that sexual expression is most often associated with men, while girls and women are most often portrayed simply as passive objects of men’s sexual interests. Thus, men are still viewed as the aggressors or initiators, while women are the recipients of their gaze.
There are many scholars who have documented the mix of “commodification, development and sexualization and its confusing relationship to desire” (American Psychological Association, 2007; Harris, 2004; McClelland & Fine, 2008). While girls’ and women’s bodies are used as objects to sell all kinds of products, families, teachers and schools fight these messages by nullifying their innate sexual curiosities and regulating their movements. Michelle shared an image of her and her twin brother to illustrate the double standard in her family related to dating and relationships. She started by talking about a friend at school: “One girl was talking about how her brother always goes out and does things, and they don’t care if he dates many girls, but if I say I like a boy, they don’t like that. I’m not allowed to go out as late as he is, even though he’s younger than me”. Her brother was allowed much more freedom to “go out” and date multiple girls, likely because it is considered in line with notions of traditional masculinity. However, in order for her to be considered feminine, her parents regulated her relationships more and made sure she had a stricter curfew.

There is a strange convergence of groups and individuals who come together to control, stifle and regulate girls’ sexuality. They include parents, conservative religious groups, policymakers and educators from all parts of the political spectrum. The dominant response from parents, teachers and other stakeholder groups is to portray girls as “lacking the capacity psychologically or physically to handle the press/expectations and they are denied the education, community for healthy development (McClleland & Fine, 2011, p. 236). Thus, many might argue, since girls are physically weaker than boys, adults must unite to protect their innocence, ensure their physical and emotional safety, and limit their self-expression for their own good.

The young women in Project Citizen-Girl are struggling to define their own desire to be sexual beings and as citizens, while facing a sea of sexual messaging directed at girls and women. They know there is something false and destructive about these dominant images. They want spaces to critically engage with and disrupt these messages and develop a strong sense of self. They feel trapped, having to truly express their sexuality and desire for intimacy and relationship, while balancing the pressures to be both sex objects and “good” girls.
They described how in school, they framed sex education as mostly about how the body works, how babies are made and as Jane put it: “don’t get pregnant lessons”. When given the opportunity to discuss sex education, they had a lot to say and the conversation flowed animatedly. For example, Michelle shared a story about her sex education class in grade nine. “One of my gym teachers, she’s really “out there” because we are learning sex education. And most of the girls in the class, put up for “prude” even the girls who didn’t believe it, and one girl put up for “slut,” because, she said, “I don’t want to be disapproved.” So I think it’s a double-edged sword. It’s okay for boys to do things, but we can’t do them”.

The more they talked, the more the group began to express anger about the way schools dealt with sexuality, teaching girls to deny their own desires while at the same time they must face a wall of hyper-sexualized, commodified imagery of women in the media. They are conscious of the mixed messages they are getting and are disappointed in the hypocrisy they see in adults and authority figures. Janice shared a number of images to illustrate the pressures on girls:

This is a picture of a teen magazine and every month they have a ranking of the hottest guy and the hottest girl. It’s kind of weird and disturbing. Every month they have someone from their race and they show you how to be like her/him-- personality wise as well. Like, she likes banana milkshakes, and my cousin will be like, lets go get a banana milkshake. They’re destroying identity. Nobody is unique anymore because they’re trying to be like pop stars and if you like strawberry milkshake, get a strawberry milkshake. Don’t get a banana one because Selena Gomez likes it.

In their analyses, the girls talked at length about the relentless pressures they feel to care about their appearances and follow dominant gender norms related to body and physical appearance. Andrea told us that her mother constantly advised her to look better and pay more attention to her appearance. Janice showed a picture of a billboard of a half naked playboy playmate’s Vegas show while in Vegas as well as one of the Victoria’s Secret wings that travel to different shopping malls so girls can compare themselves to a Victoria’s Secret Model. The girls were aware of how this valuing of a girl’s appearance often pits girls against one another unnecessarily and they became competitive about their looks and their
clothes. Several girls showed images from semi-formal dances at their schools where they talked about the extensive rituals that many girls go through to prepare.

We have these appointments where they go and do their nails and we go to each other’s houses to do our makeup and we spend like six hours and they get so stressed about it. It’s ridiculous. It’s kind of sad because they spend a lot of time that they could do something like Plan Canada or something or be more productive. In grade eight, this girl compared how expensive her dress was and as soon as this other girl beat her by like 10 dollars, she went and got another dress. I’m like are you crazy?

In this conversation, Janice also showed how “performing femininity” is also linked to issues of class and privilege. In the previous example, girls are not only competing to be the most physically attractive, but are also using the trappings of femininity to show off their wealth and class positioning. While Janice talked about girls competing with expensive prom dresses, Janice talked about girls displaying wealth by carrying purses with designer labels or bracelets from Tiffany’s.

These young women must dig deep to connect with their own needs while simultaneously being taught to be asexual and hypersexual at the same time. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2011) talk about the damaging trifecta of discourses that frame the way gender is materialized including: the commodification and corporatization of sex and gender, the individualization, and the framing of gender inequality as a problem only in the developing world (Eidoo, 2011; Jiwani, 2010). Although this group of young women are able to provide insightful critique of the sexualization of girls and women and the lengths to which girls will go to meet these expectations: they recognize that to some degree, they must also live within this environment. They too are implicated in these discourses. The smothering of their ideas about sexuality and self-expression represents the tension between their own innate curiosity and desires and the contradictory messages they get from family, school and society. The girls recognize that they are being placed in a very difficult position between being sexual objects and active citizens. In many ways, their struggles are similar to those described by feminist author Naomi Wolfe in her 1993 book entitled *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How to Use It* (Wolf, 1993). “I am sick of the opposition trying to make me
choose between being sexual and serious; and I am sick of being split the same way by victim feminism. I want to be a serious thinker and not have to hide the fact that I have breasts; I want female sexuality to accompany, rather than undermine, female political power (Wolf, 1993, 184).

**New Forms of Civic Engagement**

While there are many in Canada who claim that young people are apathetic and are lacking in civic values (Gregg, 2006; Griffiths, 2009). My description of the research process, and indeed the girls’ enactment of citizenship, would be incomplete without discussing some of the more nontraditional forms of civic engagement that the girls used to do a variety of things including: to express their perspectives on important issues, to organize events and fundraisers, raise awareness of issues, and to share resources. As many recent scholars have described (Bell, 2006; Boyd, 2006; Lenhart et al., 2006; Rheingold, 2008), young people are increasingly using a variety of media tools as important form of civic engagement. This new expression can take different forms including: posting videos on Youtube; sharing spoken word or poetry online; posting “rants” online, creating an online blog; sharing online petitions or protests; or creating photo essays on SlideShare or Flickr. Many of these activities continue to be excluded in many dominant measures of civic engagement and are also under-theorized in the literature on education for citizenship. In fact, Skelton and Valentine (2003) found that “when young people’s action is looked for, rather than focusing on what they are not doing, it becomes clear that even groups of young people traditionally assumed not to be active social agents are in fact demonstrating forms of political participation and action (Rheingold, 2008, p. 98).

Though the young women in my study do not necessarily explicitly refer to their own activities as examples of their civic engagement, it became clear that they were all using various forms of these modern tools regularly to express their perspectives and engage with others on important civic issues. These girls used all manner of digital and media citizenship as forms of civic engagement and participation, for raising awareness and education about issues, to generate online petitions related to important legislative or political issues within the formal political structures, or for fundraising campaigns to support overseas development
work or human rights campaigns. More significantly perhaps, I participated with them in several forms of online/digital/visual communications throughout the research process as well. We used text messages, various social media and networking sites to organize, share information and communicate in between meetings, share photos, resources, statistics, web links, blogposts, and videos. Initially, they had suggested to me to use social media as a way for us to keep in contact as a group and organize the research process. In fact, I asked if anyone wanted to invite the participants to join a group and about half an hour after our kick-off meeting, one young woman had already created a Facebook page for our group, invited all the participants and generated a logo for the group along with a brief description of the project.

**Conclusion:**

**Girlhood, Schooling and Civic Participation**

One might ask what these struggles with bodies, sexuality, academic success and motherhood have with girls’ notions and patterns of citizenship and civic participation? How do girls make sense of the complex web of mixed messages they receive about the way they should behave in society? If they are being told consistently that they are valued more for their appearance over their contributions, what implications does that have for their full participation in civil society, business and political life? What would these societal structures and processes look like if they truly valued and included the contributions of women in curriculum, in schooling, in citizenship? If girls and women are valued more for their appearance and less for their participation, what implications does it have for their roles and relationships in civic life?

It is clear from this discussion of smothered discourses, that these young women, who come from a wide range of backgrounds, reveal some of complex and contradictory nature of being a young, female-citizen in the diverse, multicultural urban centre of Toronto. Because of the multiple pressures placed on them by families, peers, teachers and the media, they must negotiate how to define themselves both as independent adult-learner-citizens, while at the same time as being accepted by the multiple communities to which they belong. In essence, this complexity is in part because they are being asked to function as sex objects,
citizens, leaders, achievers, civic participants, and agents of change simultaneously. Finally, there are still many inconsistencies, omissions and outright exclusions that the girls did not raise in the interviews, meetings or photographs. In the next section, I will uncover another layer of the data, by exploring the discourses that are silenced altogether.

“Silenced” Voices:
Understanding the Contradictory Discourses of Being “Citizen-Girls”

Indeed, it can be argued that many groups within Canada are not well represented in the official narrative of our nation that appears in school curricula as education for citizenship. There are complex forces that determine which groups within society are featured prominently in our history, and which are marginalized or excluded altogether. There was a significant gap between what the seven young women in this study prioritized in their lives, and the ways in which schools define Canadian identity and citizenship. It was clear from these girls’ lives that there is a tension between the messages they received about their roles as females and their roles as citizens, which is also mirrored in much of the academic literature.

The lives of these seven girls in many ways demonstrate this disparity and the ways it plays out in people’s lives. In addition, this tension also aligns with the central feminist argument that there continues to be a huge gap between the guarantees and promises of equal citizenship for women, and the actual, lived experiences of women (Pateman, 1988; Foster, 1999). A gap, I would argue, which remains under-examined and under-theorized in much citizenship learning. Girls and young women, in particular racialized minority and immigrant girls, are often faced with a series of contradictions, disconnects, and outright silences as they learn what their roles are in society, as females and as citizens. Further, Finney (2007), Riviere (2005) and others have argued, racialized minority girls or new Canadians, are even further excluded because their lives are shaped by an intersection of multiple identities, such as race, cultural background, and class. In a way, the following section answers the call of Fine and McClelland (2010) who challenge researchers to “to craft methods that account for the cellophane wrap; to study the structures and dynamics of young women’s lives; and to design research that troubles the consensus about what can be heard between dominant
discourses and those who speak about them”. Thus, in exploring the discourses that were effectively silenced by dominant discourses, I hoped to both recognize the girls’ own voices and perspectives while simultaneously analyzing how they are situated in structures of power in society.

**Mom and Me:**

**Conflicted Feelings About Motherhood and the “Feminine”**

Over time, it became clear that a theme of major significance was effectively silenced while the group analyzed notions of citizenship and civic participation, representing a split between the girls’ private lives and their public identities, between their families and their schools, and between their roles as females and as citizens. There was an obvious tension between appreciating their mothers and distancing themselves from them. These intelligent, ambitious young people want to become successful, educated leaders in their communities, and indeed their society. In order to achieve this goal of being a “desirable” citizen, as defined by their families, schools and society, they enact what they have learned as significant to citizenship and ignoring traditionally feminine role models, such as their mothers.

In the first few meetings while they were presenting images about own interests, families and backgrounds, they talked about how much their mothers meant to them and supported their growth and development. In the group analysis, several girls deliberately shared photographs of their mothers to pay tribute to their significance in their lives.

The ideas that these girls are expressing mirror the contradictory messages they receive from society at large about their roles as females. Priya shared an image of her mother in the kitchen, describing how much she does for her and her sister, especially considering that she is a single parent. As I previously described, Priya’s mother moved from Sri Lanka as a refugee and now works several jobs to ensure her daughters have more opportunities than she did. Similarly, Mihika talked about how her mother also took on several jobs while also assuming most of the household responsibilities to support her three children. At another point, however, Mihika adamantly discussed how she would not be forced into such an arrangement if she has a family some day.
Though they do not discuss it, they recognize that the amount of work their mothers do in the home limits their participation outside the home. This is a consequence of gender roles that has been well documented in feminist literature (Charlesworth, 1992; Graycar, 1992; Lister, 1999; Pateman, 1998), but remains outside the purview of much mainstream theorizing about citizenship. In addition, Mihika, who described her mother as doing everything in the house, had the strongest negative reaction when asked to envision her future, and said she would never get married. This seeming confusion is in fact not their own, but rather a reflection of how our society continues to devalue “the feminine” and exclude the contributions of women in the private sphere. In effect, this exclusion reflects the major disconnect between our lives and roles within the private sphere and what is valued, included and validated within the public sphere.

This conflicted relationship with mothers and motherhood has been documented in much psychological literature (Luttrell, 2000; Gilligan, 1991). Lutrell (2000) describes it as a symbolic struggle with one’s own gender and process of self-making as a female living in a patriarchal society (Luttrell, 2000, p. 513). It is difficult not to feel confused about this role when you know the significance your mother has played in your life and yet see that it is not recognized nor valued by society at large. Motherhood is often treated merely as the key biological function of women, as Janice described in our meeting, it is the “role that women were born to play”. Yet, motherhood does not get acknowledged as a key part of our civic structures and society. If feminine roles such as motherhood are treated as “biological destiny” and are positioned as predetermined by nature, as opposed to being viewed socially constructed, it is much more difficult to criticize and change.

In addition, this conflicted relationship with mothers has been well documented by many writers, psychologist and scholars (Gilligan, 1989, 1991; Grumet, 1998). For generations, young women who seek to escape the traditional restrictions placed on women’s lives in society have mixed feelings about their mothers and the many roles traditionally associated with women. If these girls are realizing that women are treated as second-class citizens and motherhood is the ultimate female role, then it is natural that young women will feel conflicted about it, especially as they are entering adulthood and are seeking expanded roles in society. Although they never expressed it directly, the girls in this project are
becoming more aware of the unfairness of the arrangement that it was their mothers who were responsible for so many more things within the private sphere, with little acknowledgement of these contributions. Current studies conducted by Statistics Canada reveals that although there has been some progress on addressing inequalities within household division of labour, women in Canada still assume the majority of duties within the home (Marshall, 2007).

Interestingly, the girls in this project also expressed feelings of guilt that they did not assist their mothers more with the household chores. Chodorow (1995) documented what she argued was a common phenomenon, which is that girls and young women are plagued with feelings of guilt when they become more aware of this inner conflict. In fact, she argued that these mixed feelings actually limit women’s feelings of autonomy, pleasure and achievement, as they try to both emulate mothers and escape them.

On the other hand, the young women in Citizen-Girl research stridently argued that they would not have a similar division of labour if they themselves had a relationship or a family. They seemed confident that their own families would not follow traditional gender norms and that society would be more gender egalitarian by the time they were old enough to have their own families. This assumption may come from the optimism of youth or may be a sign of the girls’ sense of agency and empowerment, emerging in part from their activism. They may have faith that their efforts will actually impact gender equality in society.

Most importantly, this complex relationship with motherhood and traditionally feminine roles reveal incongruities in how girls feel about the roles that women play in society (Luttrell, 2000, p. 514). As Grumet (1998) and others have illustrated, young women also express mixed feelings about the roles typically assumed by women (mothering, teaching, etc). These girls seem to be expressing a similar ambiguity, talking about the mothering role (that they themselves will likely assume at some point). In addition, this apparent separation from their mothers is a way for them to distance themselves from the unappealing expectations of them as women and also distract them from the effects of social inequality on women’s lives (Luttrell, 2000, p. 514).
This notion was raised in 1988 by Marilyn Warring, feminist economist and former Member of Parliament in New Zealand, in her 1988 book, *If Women Counted*. She argues that our definitions and measures of citizenship would be significantly different if the many contributions of women were given monetary value in our economic structures. According to her argument, in a capitalist system, work that is not given economic value is valued less by society or excluded altogether. The girls did not explicitly make this argument. However, their discussion of citizenship and civic participation was purely of actions and activities within the public sphere and did not explore the overlap or interconnections between their lives in the home and in the family with their activism or volunteer work. Even after previous discussions about the neglect of women’s roles in society, these smart and critically-minded young women did not examine their own conflicted views and the relationship between their private and public lives. This silence reflects a disconnect between what they truly value and what is valued “officially” in schools and society as part of our civic fabric. In addition, it reflects the divide between what we teach young people about what is expected of them as citizens, and what they are learning about their gendered roles in society. In essence, girls learn to adopt their subservient roles within a male-dominated society.

**Responsibility Over Rights:**

**What Counts as Civic Participation?**

When we shifted the discussion to ideas about citizenship and participation in civic and political life, there was an apparent and dramatic divide between our earlier conversations of their private lives, their families and mothers, and their ideas about civic participation. Any recognition of this disconnect is effectively silenced by the ways that these girls are learning citizenship in their school. The majority of the images and discussions centered on ideas of multiculturalism, cultural diversity, social action, voting and volunteerism, all themes that are prominent in Canadian history and citizenship education curricula (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2005, 2008). Despite their earlier conversations about the division of labour in their families, they did not connect these unequal relationships within the home to their potential participation (or exclusion from) the public spheres. Thus, I argue that though these seven impressive young women critique gender expectations and are involved in a range of civic activities, they still conceive of citizenship mostly in terms of
their own responsibilities to contribute to their communities. These activities can be described as being somewhat connected with traditional gender expectations of the “good” girl.

The girls defined citizenship mostly in terms of their own individual responsibility and a sense of service to the multiple communities to which they belong. In fact, though there was some recognition of the need for increased social justice on behalf of certain minoritized groups in society, the concept of rights was totally absent from our discussions. In spite of their participation and membership in a girls’ rights’ organization, they did not use the language or concepts of the responsibilities of the nation to its citizens, nor did they refer to either the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or the United Nations Charter. In their conversations, interviews and photographs, they emphasized that it is the duty of the individual citizen to “get informed”, “get involved” and “make a difference” in their society. They did not talk explicitly about how gender norms reinforce traditionally “feminine” ideas of civic participation as being associated with helping, civic responsibility and being of service.

There is only a single photo that explicitly brought the two spheres together. Janice took a photo of a young girlfriend of hers holding a baby in one hand and a cell-phone in the other. She described this as symbolizing the balance between their roles as wives and mothers and their professional or public life (Illustrated by the phone). She used the image in a positive way, to illustrate how women could balance these different expectations and worlds, as opposed to what is a challenge.
This picture shows motherhood – the traditional notion of women and how they are supposed to be a mother and have a child and stay at home. But then she’s holding an iPhone which symbolizes work and strength and her career. I think the message of this picture is that women can be at home and take care of their child as well as being in business and stuff and getting a better education. (Janice)

Thus, we can see her optimistic view that women can do it all. They can balance their roles as wives and mothers as well as an expanded role in the public sphere, as educated professionals, she does not address potential challenges of these multiple roles that women play. In addition, she and the other girls did not examine the relationship between private and public participation, as it is not examined very frequently in the learning of citizenship, either in schools or outside of schools. However, I found that there was no discussion of the relationship between the family and society, between gendered roles within the home and citizenship roles outside the home, and between the private and the public. As Preston et al. (2006) and others (Foster, 2000; Lister, 1997; Arnot & Dillabough, 2007) have argued it is impossible to truly understand some of the differences in the participation of men and women without examining the connection between their roles within the private and public spheres. “Participation as a citizen cannot be understood separately from their participation in a
family unit, met through the fulfillment of highly gendered and normative family roles – that inform wider civic participation (Preston et al., 2006, p. 1637).

Throughout the entire process of interviews, meetings photographs and exhibits, the girls spoke consistently about the importance of individual and young people “getting involved and “finding their cause at whatever level you feel most comfortable at getting involved”. It appears, perhaps not surprisingly, that their ideas about citizenship and participation are closely in line with more traditional gendered expectations of females as self-sacrificing, caring and maternal citizens (Noddings, 1994; Gilligan, 1991). Many scholars have described this line of argument as “maternal feminism”, which points out some general differences between the roles that males and females play and suggests we must validate these different roles, in particular that of women as maternal, caring citizens.

Gilligan documented a central tension in women’s lives between responsibility to self and others, women are caught in a “double bind”, between a culture that “equates feminine goodness and self-sacrifice and a culture that equates adulthood with separation, individualism and detachment” (Gilligan, in Lather, 1986, p. 193). It is expected that young women will learn to sacrifice, follow expectations and not challenge gender norms, putting their own desires behind those of men. The young women in Project Citizen-Girl all have a strong sense of commitment to “helping others”, to volunteering, tutoring, and are all involved in a wide range of activities.

Feminists and ordinary women have for decades highlighted how women must “learn to be attentive to multiple demands to tolerate frequent interruptions and to think about more than one thing at a time”, balancing the myriad of responsibilities both inside and outside the home (Bateson, 1994, p. 92). It is often described as the “double work day” and much research has explored the impact of this arrangement on women’s lives and their participation in society (Pateman, 1988). Studies found that despite many significant changes to women’s roles in the workforce and outside the home, these changes have not been met with related changes to gender roles and division of labour within the home (Pyke, 1994). Even more dramatically, Pyke’s household survey in 1994 found that women’s advancements in the workplace did not have a significant effect on men’s contributions to
childcare and household duties. Though this study was conducted in 1994, the arrangements have not changed significantly (Marshall, 2007). This arrangement is true for most of the girls in Project Citizen-Girl, most of who described a similar arrangement within their own family. More importantly perhaps, any acknowledgement or critique about this relationship and its impact on school achievement, life pathways, civic participation or future participation was missing from the rich variety of our discussion topics.

In spite of much research to illustrate the impact of this arrangement on women’s lives and roles in societies around the globe, the double work day continues to be the way that most people live, including the girls in this study and their own families. Millions of women around the globe and throughout history can understand the experience of having to balance the many and sometimes conflicting demands placed on them as females. Women are often charged with balancing most of the parenting, childcare, cooking and housework while also doing paid work outside the home. Most damagingly, from a societal perspective, these traditional roles of women are most often not viewed as “citizenship” or contributing to the society. They are expected and assumed, but do not get included in mainstream conceptualization of citizenship in education.

In addition to a continued gendered patterns of participation within the home and the family, the young women in this study also described similar patterns of participant within their schools and communities. Girls participate and volunteer and “boys do sports”. Janice even goes so far as to suggest that boys who do want to participate don’t want to be seen by others joining clubs or getting involved for fear of being labeled lacking in masculinity. The girls discuss how most of the people who join clubs in their schools, ranging from the environmental club to Model United Nations to student government are girls. There are a few exceptions to these patterns, and student government is one. This gendered pattern seems to be in line with other studies exploring patterns of civic engagement along gender, including a large quantitative study examining civic engagement across 27 countries (Torney-Purta, et al., 2001). Many quantitative studies have reflected gender differences in civic participation, which I discussed in my literature review. Women’s civic participation tends to be more local, as in within community organizations or schools, but also transnational through NGOs or organizations from their countries or origin. In contrast, they found that generally men’s
participation tends to be drawn more to formal structures and positions, associated with formal authority and power (Torney-Purta et al., 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1997). While some may attribute these differences to genetic differences between male and females, this study seems to point to a widespread process, funneling girls and boys into assuming different roles in their families, schools and communities.

Throughout the research, it became increasingly obvious that the girls’ notions of citizenship were more often associated with notions of responsibility and not so much drawing on the concept of rights. These girls were part of a group through Plan Canada focused on building understanding of girls’ rights built firmly on concepts of human rights and girls’ rights in particular, referring to the United Nations charter for human rights. In spite of this potential for drawing on rights, our interviews, meetings and photos all pointed most often to the idea that citizenship and civic participation were most often about their responsibility to their family, communities, nation and even the global community. They did not discuss the responsibility of the nation to its citizens, or the idea that they had rights and entitlements and could hold the state accountable to these rights.

When asking the girls in one-on-one interviews, they displayed a long-term commitment to the various activities, clubs and volunteer work that they were involved in. I asked about how the responsibilities were divided in the home, attempting to get a better understanding about potential connections between their contributions and responsibilities within the family, the home and the “private spaces” and their engagement in the public spaces. Most of them shared the fact that their families were not involved in many volunteer activities, cultural groups, activism or political organizations. In addition, most of them described that they had limited responsibilities within the home and that their parents (most often their mothers) did most of the chores and took care of most of the responsibilities within the home. Andrea and Janice described feeling guilty about “being a bad child” for not helping as much in the home as she should.

It seems that there was little connection between their concepts of gender and the roles of women and men, to their discussions of citizenship. Interestingly as well, our discussion of citizenship frequently tied it to concepts of cultural, racial and religious
diversity and acceptance, but not gender equality or diversity. This difference is not altogether surprising, since there is a strong emphasis in Ontario curriculum and local GTA schools on learning and celebrating cultural diversity, largely in response to the changing demographics in Toronto’s schools.

These girls see civic engagement as purely in public spaces, school, community, NGOs, politics, but do not recognize a connection between their private commitments and their public engagement. All the girls except Macy describe themselves as not having many chores to do with the home and that their parents do not require them to do much around the home stands in contrast to many studies about immigrant girls and racialized minority girls in Canada (Handa, 2003; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000) that talk about the many limitations that families place on girls’ ability to move around freely, thereby potentially limiting their ability to participate in activities and programs outside the school context. In contrast, this small group of girls all had families who let them come to workshops on Saturdays for BIAAG and Project Citizen-Girl.

The conversations we had about gender and citizenship seem to be distinct, reifying the division between public and private that feminists of all backgrounds have critiqued in society. There seems to be an inability to think about how the roles that usually only women play with the home and the private spaces of our lives (i.e. cooking, cleaning, mothering, parenting etc.) may relate to our desire or ability to participate “out” in the community, voting or volunteering, or running for office. One fundamental question raised by the stories of these girls is also not only the division between the private and public spheres in our society, but how we define “civic participation” in our schools and curricula.

In my study, it became apparent that these girls have a deep sense of dedication and commitment to social issues that shows their sense of agency, but it also reflects the gendered nature of what they are learning about their roles in school. As they themselves argued, the “feminine” and women in general are more associated with caring, sharing, maternal feelings and looking after others first before worrying about self-care. This socialization process has been well-documented by scholars in in a range of related field, such as education (Bach, 1993), psychology (Gilligan, 1982, 1997). As Newsom (2011) suggests in the film Miss-
Many feminists have argued that “feminine goodness” continues to be associated with self-sacrifice and thus, the “good girl” would be one who is actively involved in service work, volunteer and charity work. Thus, even while the girls in my study are participating in advocacy work, explicitly social justice or feminist-focused activities, their active civic involvement is due in part to a rather traditional notion of femininity and self-sacrificing womanhood. This phenomenon raises the question: what is the impact of being “involved” in such a wide range of activities on a woman’s health and self-concept and indeed capacity to meet her own needs? If our history and civics education define participation exclusively as volunteerism and voting and does not include all the various roles that women play in the family and the home, how can we not continue to perpetuate this intellectual disconnect between our notions of gender and our definitions of citizenship?

**Business and Burnout**

While there is research examining how academic perfectionism affects girls, we still do not have enough empirical work to help understand the consequences of girls’ excessive business and civic activism, both positive and negative. In addition, there is limited work that explores the connections between learning and performing traditional feminine roles (Butler, 1990) and ideas and enactment of citizenship. In the experiences of these seven girls, it seems clear that traditional ideas of femininity are shaping their notions and enactment of citizenship and the ways they view their roles in their families, schools and society. If, as much research suggests (Globe & Mail, 2010; Hoff Summers, 2000), girls are “outperforming” boys academically, and are also “out-performing” boys in activism, advocacy and volunteer work, what consequences does it have for their current and future roles in the family and the home?

Every time I would ask the girls how they were, they answered with the same phase: “Busy and tired”. Throughout our meetings and interviews was a powerful theme of sharing and celebrating each other’s accomplishments and activities. Several girls talked about how
they liked to be busy all the time and Jane and Janice told me how their parents were worried they were too scheduled and overcommitted. Janice described her school program thusly: “(the IB program) is pretty interesting, but it definitely takes up a lot of my time and sometimes it’s really stressful and I get really depressed and angry about it. I’m trying to make other time to do other stuff besides school, like this project and Because I am a Girl.”

Over time, while I was impressed by their energy and commitment, I began to realize that there was a significant finding in this “good” citizen discourse that is both encouraging and problematic at the same time. These dedicated young people are clearly developing a sense of their individual and collective agency and the ability to make a difference in their own lives, communities, families and schools. Janice described how the process had impacted her: “Through BIAAG and Citizen Girl, I truly feel like I can make a difference in this world and that people care about what I have to say!” Participating in both the BIAAG GSB and the Citizen-Girl research project, helped them to further develop the sense that their contributions and perspectives were valued. These comments reveal their growing sense of efficacy that emerged from belonging to these kinds of groups and getting involved in this kind of activism.

At the same time, however, their sometimes single-minded focus on adding to their resumes and collecting accomplishments also has a worrisome side to it, leading to our “check-ins” at the beginning of our meetings became a competition of achievements. After a presentation that we did at an elite private girls’ school in the GTA, the guidance counselor approached me to discuss the performance anxiety and stress among girls related to achievement. This was in part due to the elite school environment and parents who likely had high expectations of their children. However, this achievement pressure is likely in part due to the larger societal discourse of girls’ achievement playing out at the school and classroom levels.

Though the civic activism of the girls in Citizen-Girl has had many positive effects on their own self-concepts and their beliefs in citizen action more broadly, the analysis of this project raised critical questions for me about other consequences that might be more negative. In addition to the silenced discourses about their conflicted feelings about
mothering, feminine roles and their recognition of their rights of citizenship, there was a missing discourse of the dark side of active citizenship and the goal of being a “good” girl, a “good student” and a “good” citizen. They began to reveal some of the negative aspects of their extreme “busy-ness”. Several girls talked about not sleeping enough and staying up all night to finish homework. Jane mentioned that her parents were very concerned about her adding more commitments to her already busy schedule for which she routinely missed classes. These more problematic aspects of citizen action did not emerge immediately. However, it became clearer over time by examining their consistent complaints about being overcommitted and fatigued, anxious about grades and tests, as well as about their collection of volunteer opportunities, conferences and general resume-building.

If women are doing better in schools, acquiring more education, doing more in their communities and volunteering more than boys, all while simultaneously trying to be feminine and desirable and bearing the brunt of the responsibilities within the family and the home—it must have serious implications for their health, their ability to care for their own needs, and their ability to advocate for themselves and greater equality within formal social structures. A handful of new studies are beginning to appear, investigating some of the consequences of perfection pressure (Martin, 2006), revealing that many girls and young women feel such pressure to be infallible at all aspects of their lives, that they live in a constant state of fear that they will be exposed as imperfect and successful at all things.

The ambitious young women of Project Citizen-Girl, though seemingly confident, outspoken and self-possessed eventually revealed their long-silenced feelings of needing to be infallible. Mihika admitted to constantly second guessing herself. “It's difficult and I do it all the time, I'm sure we all do. But it's time I do my best to believe in myself, believe in the power of my voice. I am my worst enemy because I am often negative about everything I do. I am always very pessimistic and afraid of losing. I need to try to accept that failures are normal, and that I need to overcome it. I need to have a little belief and hope for myself.” Although there are a myriad of benefits to the activism and ambition of high-achieving young women, Martin (2006) suggests, many girls suffer from a range of health problems from the resulting stress including: body image disorders, panic and anxiety disorders and depression,
to name a few. This emerging research suggests that there may be a growing trend of outwardly successful, but inwardly self-hating young women.

Conclusion

In this section, I discussed many of the discourses that emerged from the silences, omissions and contradictions in our months of meetings. I argue that they illuminate the great theoretical and real gap between what these seven girl participants are learning about what is acceptable and expected of them as girl-citizens. Concepts of traditional femininity, such as being caring, self-sacrificing and mothering are taught and simultaneously devalued, marginalized and excluded in their learning of citizenship. The result is a confusing construction of the citizen and civic participation. While these young people are indeed active, engaged and purposeful citizens, their ideas about their roles in society are still very much shaped by notions of traditional femininity. Though they may be able to see how they are portrayed in the media and recognize gendered messages in their families and society at large, at times, they seem unaware of how they take up these ideas in their discussions and their own lives. In addition, because many of the tensions and topics presented in this chapter are excluded from their learning of citizenship in schools, their more trenchant critiques about the public-private divide, the conflicted relationship with mothering and their claiming of rights remain absent.
Chapter 8

Conclusion:
A Call for Counter-Narratives and Critical Literacy

After this project, I will continue to volunteer with Plan Canada and start new initiatives on the University of Toronto campus. I have discovered a whole new side of myself and I definitely feel like a stronger individual. I still have yet to completely find myself but now am more confident in carving out my identity as I see fit. I am a feminist and I want to encourage girls to see their own value, never undermining their abilities for anyone else. (Priya, participant, age 18)

If we do not begin to discuss openly the ways in which ascribed power, whether on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual orientation, or religion, affects individual lives, we will not be truly preparing our students for citizenship in a democracy. (American Association of University Women, Gender Gaps Report, 1992, p. 81-82)

Introduction

Project Citizen-Girl focused on seven young women from the Toronto area and their perspectives on self, gender, citizenship and schooling. This study examined what girls are learning about their roles as “citizen-girls” and how their complex identities affect their understanding and enactment of citizenship in the Canadian context. Over the course of the 2010-2011 school year, I conducted interviews and facilitated a photovoice project with Andrea, Jane, Janice, Macy, Michelle, Mihika, and Priya. Together, the group took approximately two 250 photographs, wrote countless journal entries and poems, spoke at several conferences, and organized an exhibit of their work at the University of Toronto. In this dissertation, I have offered a brief narrative profile of each participant, presented selected images and a summary of major themes of their group discussions and provided my own analysis of these many sources. Exploring the lives of these young people gleaned significant findings about the relationship of some girls to the theorizing, teaching, and learning of citizenship. The participants described how they continue to face a myriad of challenges, including increasingly sexualized images of girls in the media, growing achievement pressures at school, and continued gender socialization both at home and at school.
While the girls also show resistance to these pressures and are active, caring, critical citizens, their experiences also suggest that the teaching and learning of citizenship has not adequately responded to the growing number of critiques proposed by feminist, anti-racist and post-colonial scholars. Furthermore, though they may be free to question gender expectations as young people, it remains to be seen whether they will be able to resist the new pressures that come with adulthood, marriage, family and work. Will these active “Citizen-Girls” be able to develop new, more equitable family arrangements for themselves than their mothers? Will they continue to speak up for their rights and against injustice when they become working adults? Finally, will they continue to see the value of community work, organizing and collective action in an increasingly globalized yet highly individualistic world?

The experience of working with these girls has given me hope and optimism about the commitment of young people today. The broad “spectrum of thick desire” that characterizes the wide range of their passions, interests and activities related to citizenship in the Canadian context contradicts many commonly held assumptions about girls, youth and Canadian citizens more broadly. Contrary to some studies that suggest young women lack civic knowledge (Menard, 2010), the participants in my study are not apathetic or uninterested in civic and political issues. Additionally, their interests, desires and needs are diverse, complex and sometimes contradictory, intertwining their self-concepts, their sexuality and their sense of citizenship, in contrast to many scholars’ definitions of citizen participation (Lister, 1997; McClelland & Fine, 2008). Finally, these girls also reveal how their ideas of citizenship are surfaced, smothered and often silenced entirely by complex discourses about gender, race, class, sexuality and citizenship. We cannot fully understand how these girls relate to notions of gender and citizenship without examining their relationship to structures of power. Their lives remind us to continue to challenge accepted beliefs about citizenship and to examine how dominant ideas about gender, race, sexuality and class shape the ways that young people understand the ways they fit into society.

Even while recognizing the effects of structural inequalities, it is encouraging to witness their strength, initiative, critical thinking skills, and sense of common good, despite their different backgrounds. In addition, these young people do not fit into the many
stereotypes of women that abound in the popular media. Though they may enjoy shopping and aspects of traditional femininity, they also have an interest in making a difference in their communities, relish robust discussion of real life political and social issues, and have ambitious goals for their futures. Finally, they are not merely passive objects of sexual desire or political subjugation. They are, as I have argued previously objects, subjects, citizens, students and agents of change simultaneously. Listening to their stories and seeing their lives through their own images, we can see many contradictions that young women face as they learn to find their place in their families, communities, schools and society. In this concluding chapter, I will present my final reflections and discuss some final implications from the Project Citizen-Girl study for future research, policy and educational practice.

**Researcher Reflections**

When I think of our conversations, I think of Maria Lugones’ (1987) idea of world traveling. She views research as a way to explore a rich array of cultures, traditions and peoples through the lives of their participants (Lugones, 1987). I relished when I was invited into the lives of my participants in our group meetings. We traveled from the lives of beauty pageant moms in our critique of reality TV, to the lives of orphans in Bali, and into the everyday lives of a diverse group of young women in Toronto. In Project Citizen-Girl, there were many photos of shoes, walking and moving forward. It seems clear from our discussions that the girls are trying to carve out their own paths and define their own identities, separate from the expectations of their families, teachings, friends and society at large. They recognize there are particular limitations of them because they are females, perhaps they are expected to be “good girls”, obedient, clean, respectful, “good students” and high achievers. Perhaps they are also expected to care a lot about their physical appearance and take over the cooking and cleaning as they become women, but they are obviously thinking deeply about how to differentiate their own legitimate goals, wishes and desires from those of society.
Girls’ Suggestions for Educators and Policymakers

Agency, Awareness and Activism

Through these conferences and through these events that I’ve been to, I really just realize that you actually have power no matter what gender you are, no matter what age you are, you could actually get yourself heard if you try. Because like just two years ago, I was just a girl in Grade 6…It’s so weird how I changed. (Mihika)

The participants began this project with a high degree of involvement in a wide variety of sports, clubs, artistic ventures, volunteer and advocacy work. They had already begun to develop a sense that their contributions had an impact on their communities. Mihika talked about how her tutoring was making a difference in the lives of other students. She described how she felt confident sharing her opinions in class and couldn’t understand why some of her classmates didn’t feel similarly. It appeared that participating in this collaborative, critical and visually-informed inquiry process also gave the girls a greater sense that their voices were being valued.

They talked about many of the benefits of their activism and in many ways, their experience seems to affirm other studies on youth civic engagement that highlight the positive effects of activism on young people’s sense of agency and belief in civic and political systems (Finney, 2007; Kennedy et al., 2007). Sirin and Fine (2010) found that young Muslim youth in the U.S. strengthened their belief in the success and impact of their own activism, while simultaneously using it as a way to resist prejudice and inequality. Similarly, Finney (2007) also found that girls of racialized minority backgrounds developed increased self-confidence through their activism.

Moreover, through the process of participating in the project, the girls seemed to develop a more complex understanding of gender, citizenship and the role of women in society. The process of critically examining issues of gender inequality, racism, homophobia, political participation and international development allowed them to deconstruct many dominant discourses that circulate in society. At the beginning of the study, the girls seemed much more inclined to view gender in line with more traditional notions of femininity and
masculinity. However, when asked explicitly to deconstruct these notions, they began to critically interrogate the notion that these gender differences are due mostly to biology, rather than society. Over time, it seemed that their ideas became more complex, less shaped by biological determinism and stereotypes.

Through this project, the girls developed a more critical eye about gender, moving away from a dichotomous view of gender inequality as merely a problem “over there”. “I definitely learned that the society is not socially just, but this time in a researcher’s perspective”. As Janice described, the combination of our discussions and group analysis, supplemented with research from their work with Plan Canada’s GSB, they were able to move beyond their earlier ideas about simply “helping girls in the developing world” to seeing themselves in relation to all girls. In a sense, they also their ideas illustrated a kind of transversal politics (Yuval-Davis, 1997), where they both identified diversity among girls, while also still acknowledging the importance of solidarity across differences as well.

We analyzed with numbers and facts that sometimes shocked me because I thought Canada would rank among top five for women’s justice, but in fact, it is 27th. I don’t want to go into the math and sciences anymore, politics and human rights are what I am really interested in. I achieved happiness and stress-relief when I attended meetings because I got to work with girls who share the same passion for human rights. Most importantly, I want to make this my career.

While Janice’s career goals may not pan out as she described, her comments reflect one example of the “catalytic validity” that Lather (1987) speaks about: these participants supported and pushed each other to become active spokespeople about gender equality and a range of social justice issues. In addition, it spurred their thinking and affected their lives in unpredictable ways. Janice decided that she wanted to start a daycare program to support the families of new immigrants because their work hours were very tough and they often worked shift work, making it challenging to find daycare. Additionally, Priya had been thinking of changing her major from Life Science to Anthropology and Equity studies and participating in this project seemed to finally give her the validation to make the choice. Mihika made contact with a Sri Lankan women’s rights activist and was trying to not only raise money for
her NGO that fights violence against women, but also help her develop new connections with Canadian funding and international development organizations.

As Lorenz (2010) also described in her photovoice study with brain injury survivors, using visual research methods not only provides interesting findings for the researcher, but also for those people who participated, provoking them into in depth reflection on identity and subjectivities (Lorenz, 2010). Jane described the collaborative, visual inquiry process as a productive way of not only working with others, but also gleaning important learning for the participants.

I really enjoyed getting to be with a group of like-minded girls that I could just talk frankly and bluntly with. I loved learning new things about everyone and people everywhere, and learning that the things I worried about could be talked about and people were willing to do something about it. I really enjoyed how we could do all this through photography as well, and see that those photos could represent all the things we wanted to talk about. I thought it was really neat how the photography helped to really get things out and start conversations that we may have not known how to start previously.

The girls were able to unpack other dominant discourses governing the position of girls in education and citizenship. They identified the common perception that girls are outperforming boys in schools, noting that there is much diversity with the categories of boys and girls, and pointing out examples of girls and boys who did not fit into these dominant ideas. They also highlighted many of the ways that school continues to marginalize and exclude women in textbooks, teaching and official curricula. Thus, they recognized that not all girls are super-achievers, and that girls’ higher test scores is not a sign of schooling privileging girls over boys.

Over the course of the year of the study, these young people built a trusting, supportive group that gave them a safe space to critique, celebrate each other’s accomplishments, enjoy each other’s company, discuss future goals and expose each other to new ideas and opportunities. As Priya so eloquently put it:

[My favorite things] were all of our discussions regarding the photos that we took. Our conversations were always on serious topics but interlaced with
humour and light-heartedness so as to remain personal and encouraging. It was interesting to see the perspectives that each girl brought from their varying schools and communities. Many of us had similar experiences so I felt like I could relate to and empathize with particular issues. We truly built a support system like no other.

### Figure 56. Picture of girls speaking at conference held at Toronto City Hall, fall 2012.

**“We need more anti-princess education” (Jane)**

In one of our meetings, Janice mentioned how her teacher had talked to her history class about a local organization called the Miss G Project, which was founded by a group of young women in order to lobby the Ontario Ministry of Education to develop a gender studies courses for Ontario secondary schools. The girls showed real interest in this group, and in response to their enthusiasm, I arranged to have two of the women from the Miss G Project join one of our meetings. The two women described at length how they had started the project after they had gone to university and taken their first gender studies course and realized how their education had suffered from significant gaps.

They recognized the critical exclusion of women’s lives, achievements and contributions to society as well as the absence of opportunities to critically engage with how gender continues to be constructed and learned in society and how it connects with issues of race, culture, and sexuality. It was this realization that provoked these young women to advocate for a gender studies course in Ontario secondary schools. Although they were
successful in getting the Ministry to develop and pilot test a course, in consultation with a number of local organizations, recent curriculum revisions have frozen all curriculum changes in Ontario for the time being. It remains to be seen what will happen to the gender studies course.

We wanted to learn what gaps the girls had identified in their own education—especially those related to gender—and what suggestions they might have for improvements. The conversation revealed not only the personal interests of the girls, but also their awareness of wider social issues and included suggestions as well. They discussed how gender stereotypes were prevalent in a lot of children’s books as well as in movies, especially those for younger children. In terms of elementary school curricula, the girls felt teachers needed to help young people develop more critical thinking skills, especially in relation to the stories, fairy tales and media to which young people are exposed in primary school. “We need more anti-princess education”, suggested Jane, initiating an animated discussion among the girls about the need to create more in-school opportunities for students to critique and reflect on gendered expectations and roles.

Throughout our meetings, the topic of Disney and fairy tales returned repeatedly. They had conflicted ideas about them, because they enjoy Disney movies, but also recognized the negative consequences that such traditional gender stereotypes have for young women.

Andrea: In Disney and Fairy tales they made it seem like the whole purpose of a girls’ life is to find her other self and get married and have children and then that’s the end of her life. You’re supposed to live until you’re 25- that’s when you’re supposed to find your true love and get married and never ever do anything again.

Jane: I think Disney is kind of screwing us all over. I was watching Toddlers and Tiaras, these mothers were like: my daughter just loves it! Your daughter doesn’t speak yet. Their daughters have like fake tans and they get their eyebrows waxed…Your daughter is two and she has fake teeth and fake hair. This one girl said: when I grow up I want to be a princess at Disney that waves…what kind of world are we preparing this world for? If our generation is bad, then all those under us, younger than us are going to be worse.
It was clear that this group of young women were easily able to identify these stereotypes, even while they admitted to watching the shows and movies that perpetuated them. However, they believe that schools need more actively prepare young people to withstand this wave of media messaging. They suggested a number of activities that they felt were effective in promoting critical literacy.

They argued that young people, both girls and boys need more opportunities to imagine alternative endings for fairy tales and stories, where students imagine a variety of different possibilities for male and female characters. They believe that students should have spaces to create alternative characters in their favorite stories, to identify what themes or ideas are missing from stories and what things are not usually included in stories. Their discussion revealed their hunger for counter-narratives to the dominant paradigms related to gender so young people are able to critique them and envision new possibilities, new ideas and new role models.

**Secondary School:**

**Beyond Biology and Birth Control**

When shifting our discussion to the secondary curriculum, the group recognized the invisibility of women from much of their studies. Once again, the girls discussed the exclusion of gender from much of the curriculum, the patronizing nature of sex education and the absence of spaces to engage with current issues related to gender. There was a sense that most spaces to talk about women and gender in the Canadian context were frozen in the past, as if the issue of gender inequality in Canadian society had been solved at some point in the distant past, as opposed to being an issue still needing attention.

They want conversations about gender to go beyond what they saw as a “birth control and biology” approach to sex education. They longed to have more open discussions about sexuality and power, so they can learn how to navigate intimate relationships and other relationships that are governed by power. Michelle shared a story about how her teacher opened class discussion about sex education by asking the girls the following question: “Would you rather be a prude or a slut, because good girls are prudes”. This comment generated a flurry of conversation and expression of shock from the girls, who seemed
horrified and angry. They felt that this comment symbolized the patronizing attitude of schools and adults in authority to the idea of girls learning about sex, especially in Catholic Schools. Two of the girls attend Catholic schools in the Toronto area, although one of them is not Catholic. They talked about how their sex education classes usually focused on the biological functioning of male and female bodies and often ended up stigmatizing the girls for having natural sexual curiosity. As Jane said, they wanted more real discussions about sex and not just “don’t get pregnant lessons”.

In general, the group agreed that their school learning experiences were mostly a “his-story” and they argued strongly that students should also learn about “her-story”. The girls felt that often any discussion of gender in school had been limited to women’s roles in Canadian history and the suffragette movement. Schools, in their opinion, should include the lives, experiences of women, beyond the suffragette movement and the fight for women’s voting rights. Mihika and Priya recommended specifically that students should learn about the multiple waves of the feminist movements and should link discussions of feminism to other issues such as religion and sexuality. In addition, they viewed gender inter-sectionally and in a global context and talked about their desire to learn how gender roles vary across cultures, countries and religions. Finally, they argued convincingly that teachers should be more open and prepared to connect curriculum to current issues facing real women in Canada and around the world.

The use of a collaborative research process obviously served to build on the inherent proclivities of the participants in my study and also to develop a strong sense of collective identity. Michelle, a somewhat shy girl of Jamaican origins talked about her experiences of going to a mostly White middle class school in the suburbs, it seemed to galvanize the other participants. She talked about a mural in her school that she described as racist, the other girls in the group reacted very strongly, encouraging her to speak up in school and raise her concerns with the school administration. This kind of mutual support and encouragement became a common part of our group meetings. Furthermore, their participation in the collaborative group methods also seemed to have a significant impact on the girls and their sense of self as citizens, activists and leaders. Mihika described the group in this way: We’re very similar to one another. We all have strong beliefs. We’re very different from other girls
our age. Over here we feel like we’re normal, but when I’m in school and I’m talking about feminism or things around the world. People just don’t care, or (they say) oh my god, you’re the feminist chick”.

As a conclusion to the project, I had the participants write written reflections on what they had learned and what they had achieved in this process. Their answers revealed a variety of motivations for joining the study, from “seeing issues that need to be addressed in my community”, “wanting to analyze my role in society” and “needing an outlet for my voice”. Priya, a first year university student, talked about some of the tensions arising between her and her mother, who had moved to Canada before Priya was born. She lived with her younger sister and mother, who had several jobs and told Priya she was expected to get married at the age of 25. Priya admitted to: “needing an outlet to discuss the issues that plague me as a woman in Canada. I wanted to voice my opinions on the barriers that are imposed on females, an issue no one I knew seemed to care about.” The girls talked about the rarity of similar spaces where a group of young women can get together, provide support for each other, validate their perspectives and share time to critically reflect on their lives as young, female citizens. Mihika described how significant it was for her to be part of a collaborative and critical space with other girls her own age:

Society tried to mold me into being a social stereotype and I let myself feel helpless. I was not aware of how much power I had but the Because I Am A Girl campaign commercial made me feel different. I knew that it could help me and so one of the many reasons I joined the Girls Speakers Bureau is so I could find out my true identity, what I stand for and what I believe. In the same sense the Citizen-Girl project helped me understand myself. I joined because analyzing my role in society was exactly what I wanted. Now I know who I am, I know who I am becoming however most people that surround me are not aware of this. Discussing the reasons and causes of how people see me helped me get a better understanding of not only my life but the environment I live in.

As Mihika argued in one meeting, girls need to hear and see themselves and their stories in school. They need to know that their lives are validated and valued. The girls in this study talked about drawing inspiration and motivation from each other and being able to share with
each other regularly, both successes and challenges and celebrate each other’s accomplishments, the ones like awards and good grades, but also the other ones that normally get left out. The girls celebrated small successes for example, speaking out in class against someone using racist or sexist language, or standing up for themselves with their peers, or even telling a teacher that they found the language the teacher used to be problematic and offensive. Over the course of the project, these girls seemed to develop a sense of agency to speak up to authority about issues of equity and social justice. By including the perspectives and experiences of these young women in discussions about real life, significant issues of citizenship, social justice and schooling, the process validates their private lives as relevant to the conceptualization of and discussion about what it means to be a citizen and what activities get included in our ideas of citizenship.

**Implications for Theory, Research and Educational Practice**

This study revealed that the complex identities of these girls shaped their conceptualization of citizenship and the ways they contribute to their families, schools and communities. Citizenship, as evidenced by their lives, is far more complex than the mere relationship of one individual to the nation-state (Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 2005). In addition, despite significant progress in Canadian society towards greater gender equality, this study also demonstrated that girls and boys continue to get different messages about their gender roles (Bickmore, 1997), and that traditional ideas of femininity as caring, helping and self-sacrifice, continue to shape their girls’ ideas of citizenship and civic engagement. Though they all belong to a group dedicated to girls’ rights and equality, their notions of citizenship are highly individualistic and focused on their citizen responsibilities, perhaps at the expense of their own entitlements of citizenship.

While there is a growing body of research about girls, Project Citizen-Girl also revealed the need for more innovative methodological approaches to examine in greater depth and complexity the relationship between girls and citizenship, with greater attention to intersectionality. I argue that we must broaden and deepen our definitions of citizenship, examining the relationship between the private and the public, and between messages given to girls about their sexuality and their participation in civic and political life. If they are still
expected to cater to men and define themselves to a large part in terms of their appearance and availability, it must surely impact their self-concepts as citizens. It is apparent from the experiences of the seven girls in my study that they still get contradictory messages about their sexuality, their roles within the family, and their success as students and as citizens.

Researchers and educators must continue to challenge existing ideas of citizenship to more accurately reflect the ever-evolving and emerging forms of civic expression and activism employed by young people. For example, the 7 citizen-girls in this study described such things as slut-walks, online petitions, the use of social media and video, gay-straight alliances and other activities, many of which might not be included in traditional studies on citizenship. They represent significant shifts and adaptations to civic participation that demand further study. More qualitative work is needed in this area to better understand these complex phenomena.

Furthermore, the range of “thick desire” that characterizes these citizen-girls’ civic participation also illustrated the need to continue to expand our learning of citizenship to include the notion of care as citizenship (Gilligan 1982, 1991, 1997; Noddings 1994). While we cannot generalize from these seven participants, their observations that most of the young people in their advocacy and volunteer work are girls, is troublesome and raises questions about what messages are being given to boys about masculinity, their relationships with girls, and about their citizenship roles and societal participation more broadly. Thus, this research suggests the need for young people to learn to unpack hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity that may prevent girls from viewing themselves as powerful, as equals and as leaders, and that limits boys from seeing themselves as caring, as nurturing and as partners.

While our current government may be more concerned with a narrowing of citizenship definitions and a reassertion of White, British Monarchic history and traditions (Joshee, Pashby, & Ingram, 2012), this study implies the need for a continued push towards greater pluralism and heterogeneity in our theorizing, teaching, and learning of citizenship in Canada. Though the group of participants is small, this research also revealed the complexity within this group, showing how their race, cultural backgrounds, religion, socioeconomic status, and location all impacted the ways they view themselves and their place in society.
We must continue to dispel false notions of universal girlhood and citizenship that erase differences and continue to privilege some groups and individuals over others while promising universal access for all (Mouffe & Laclau in Hernandez, 1997). We must, as Hernandez (1997) suggests, continue to “assert a multiplicity of voices” (1997, p. 26). At the same time, these girls’ experiences also illustrate the need to foster a sense of solidarity, and common good among all Canadians across differences, that leads to a greater sense of belonging and continued collective action to improve society for all.

The girls suggested the need for more comprehensive inclusion of women and gender into the entire school process, beyond merely the mention of settlers, suffragettes and sex education. To paraphrase Victoria Foster (1996), we cannot merely add women and stir, expecting young people to come away with a deep understanding of how gender continues to shape our society. Additionally, as Hahn (1998) and Jiwani (2011) argue, we cannot merely portray gender or racial inequality as problems in the distant past or in distant lands. We must go beyond a list of token female firsts so students can more critically examine their own learning of gender (Arnot, 2008; Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2000, Noddings, 1994).

Moreover, Project Citizen-Girl also validates other studies (Hahn, 1998) that suggest the need for more attention to critical media literacy in schools. If, as Hahn suggests, young people get most of their citizenship learning through media, and not formal schooling, it is incumbent on educators to help students interpret the complex web of messages they get about how they fit into society. The girls in my study indeed showed the contradictory messages given to girls about their feminine roles, ranging from hypersexualization of girls in movies and magazines, to the denial of girls’ sexuality in schools. If we want young people to be able to resist these messages about gender and define their own participation in relationships, in families and in society, we need more critical literacy, more mentorship and more support within schooling.
In response to the growing documentation of girls’ marginalization and exclusion, increasingly, girls’ education and “empowerment” has come to be constructed as a good investment, appealing to those individuals and governments that may not be prioritizing girls. As Taft (2011) reminds us in Rebelgirls, globally, there is now a myriad of organizations, books, websites, and programs that claim to be promoting girls’ empowerment and citizen-participation (Taft, 2011). In Canada, there are a range of girl-focused programs that include: the Plan Canada Because I am a Girl initiative, the Girl Guides of Canada, The YWCA, the Miss G project and the Young Women on the Move program of the Toronto District School Board. However, these programs are most often focused on including girls in the existing status quo and not on their expressions of social critique, transformation or social change (Taft, 2011). Furthermore, most of these programs do not provide spaces for young people to critically engage with dominant, raced, classed ideas of femininity and masculinity. If these programs are designed to “empower” girls, what are they empowering girls to do, under what conditions, and in what contexts?
This increased focus on “girl power” initiatives among NGOs, community, and education organizations, has also been accompanied by new discourses of girlhood, femininity and new “types” of girls. Scholars have highlighted how girls are adapting and reinventing ideas of femininity. Kindlon (2009) argued that there is a new type of girl, an alpha girl, who is not constrained and controlled by traditional, hegemonic femininities and is able instead to develop a blend of masculine and feminine traits and are extremely close to their fathers, as role models. In this way, these young women are less constrained by ideas about femininity and are able to develop greater self-confidence. Some scholars have focused on the academically successful girl (Foster, 1999; Ringrose, 2007), others on the modern, “future girl” (Kindlon, 2006), and there has been much coverage of the bitchy, bullying girl (Wiseman, 2003).

At the same time, and perhaps related to the focus on girls in scholarly research, there has been a growing interest among private companies, the corporate sector and media organizations, resulting from the realization that girls, and tweens in particular are a powerful commercial force in North America (Taft, 2011). In fact, argues Harris, “It is primarily as consumers that young people are given a place in the contemporary social life, and it is girls above all that are held up as exemplars of this new citizenship”, which one might describe as consumer citizenship (Harris, 2004). In effect, many efforts at harnessing the power of girls views them as consumer-citizens and defines their participation merely in terms of the purchasing power.

At a 1998 conference, researcher Mitchell (2004, 2006, 2008) of McGill University argued that there was an urgent need for a more coherent field of study focused on girls, leading to the founding of a journal by Mitchell, Kirk and Weber in 2009. The founding of this journal also represented a coalescence and emergence of a coherent, so-called field of study called Girlhood Studies. As Adams and Bettis (2009) describe, a “central tenant of girlhood studies is the need to study girls in all their diversity and to explain how girlhood is articulated in sites that girls themselves see as important”. In essence, this developing area of research and theorizing responds to some of the earlier work related to girls by recognizing that they are distinct from adult women and from boys, but are also a diverse group.
themselves whose lives are shaped by multiple factors beyond gender, such as race, class, culture, sexuality, and geography.

In particular, several new books were released in the 2000s about girls and adolescent women, focusing not on their body image, self-esteem issues or learned passivity as in the earlier studies of the 1980s and 1990s. Terms such as “Future-Girls” or “Can-do girls” (Harris, 2004) were coined to describe a “new breed of girl who is confident, assertive, competitive, athletic and future-oriented and not interested in marriage and sexualized femininity” (Kindlon, 2009). In addition, several researchers highlighted a rise in female bullying and aggression (Sessions Step, 2009, Wiseman, 2002). Wiseman’s (2009) best-selling book Queen Bees and Wannabes also led to a major motion picture entitled Mean Girls, written by and starring Tina Fey. These works described a supposedly growing trend of girl on girl bullying and violence. In addition, Rachel Simmon’s (2002) Odd-Girl Out and Lynn Mickel Brown’s (2005) book, Girlfighting: Betrayal and rejection among girls also described how girls gained short-lived power over other girls through relational aggression.

There is a growing interest in getting girls access to education in the Global South, and exploring girls’ relational aggression, school achievement and consumption in the Global North. However, frequently in this literature, girls’ ideas about citizenship and the wide range of their civic activities remain largely under-examined (Taft, 2011). In addition, Hahn (1998) found that schools were not the only sources of learning about citizenship for young people. Instead, in this study, many teenagers explored ideas of citizenship, identity and democracy through a range of mass media and online methods including: blogging, sharing videos and photographs, online chat, Facebook and other visual sites, online fundraising and education campaigns.

A number of studies also highlighted girls’ ideas and expressions of resistance and political organizing (Kelly et al., 2006; Leblanc, 1999; McRobbie, 2000). In Dodging and Weaving, Harris (2001) explored girls’ political ideas, spaces and narratives and called for more empirical work on girls’ ideas of citizenship and political expression. Kristy Evans (2005) looked at girls’ online activism in “Cyber-Girls”, and Plyer (2005) chronicled the lives and expressions of radical activist girls in the Toronto area, many of whom are
racialized minority girls. These emerging forms of civic engagement, much like with much of women’s grassroots activism, represent new spaces for citizenship practice, and yet are excluded from much of the mainstream literature on social movements and civic engagement (Miraftab, 2004; Rose, 2000; Taft, 2011).

Girls are given places in society as consumers, as purchasers and as achievers, but are they recognized for their activism, their civic engagement and their contributions to families, schools and society as well? As Taft suggests, they “continue to appear in both the public and academic domain only as occasional images – as visual objects rather than as intelligent political subjects” (Taft, 2012, p. 5). We also need to analyze the diversity within the category of girls look at their lives, through a lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1993) to understand how identity factors shape their experience of girlhood. Within the more recent research on girls, there has been a similar exploration of ideas about femininity and masculinity. Scholars like Reay (2001), Finney (2007) and Mirza (2000) have found diverse discourses of femininity, discussing how race, class, geography shape the way that girls learn and live their roles in society. We must examine connections, areas of overlap or contradictions between work on girls’ lives, their learning of femininity and the gendered messages they receive, and their participation in families, schools and society.

The fields of girlhood studies and youth civic engagement highlight some of the new ways that girls are contributing to their communities, resisting discourses of hegemonic or destructive femininity and inventing new civic and political spaces and activities. In addition, we must examine the complexity and diversity of girls’ lives and the ways in which their multiple identities shape their lives and experiences of being girl-citizens in Canada. We cannot assume that all girls are alpha girls and super-achievers, nor can we assume that all boys are falling behind, as many suggest. In fact, a 2008 study revealed that contrary to the dominant idea that boys are in crisis and girls are successful, there are in fact significant intra-group differences within the categories of girls and boys that far outweigh the differences between boys and girls (Martino, 2008).

Why should educators, parents and citizenship researchers concern themselves with girls’ private lives, school experiences and civic contributions? What can we learn about the
participation of women in families, communities and civic and political structures in society by understanding how girls learn about gender and citizenship? “Girlhood is not an irrelevant social category, it is important to global capital and global citizenship, and therefore, to our understanding of political resistance and social movements” (Taft, 2011, 6). Thus, I will argue in this thesis that in order to situate girl-citizens within local, national and global discourses about identity, gender, citizenship and schooling, we need what Yuval-Davis (1999) calls transversal politics. We need to examine both the collective needs of girls, as distinct from boys and adult women, while at the same time recognizing the multiple layers of oppression caused by the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality and context. We also need to look at girls’ own description of their lives and their perspectives on being girl-citizens and situate them within the dominant discourses in schools and society, paying attention to both their individual agency as well as the multiple and complex set of values, structures and processes that shape their lives.

**Conclusion**

On October 11th, 2012, the world celebrated the first International Day of the Girl Child and indeed there has been significant progress made to address gender inequality and improve the lives of girls and women around the globe (Beijing Conference for Women, 2010). There are more girls in schools, more women in political and decision-making structures, and new legislation to protect girls and women from a host of violent and anti-women practices. In Canada, the lives of women have also significantly improved since my grandmothers emigrated from Sweden and Poland and were not able to go on to post-secondary education. Moreover, Canada has also made strides at addressing inequality and discrimination based on race, skin color, language and cultural background. A growing public debate about our national identity and concepts of citizenship has gripped our nation, contesting long held definitions about equity, diversity citizenship and democratic participation. This changing public debate is partially in response to our rapidly changing demographic make-up, global economic and political pressures, and a recognized need to ensure our societal structures and values reflect the equitable treatment of all citizens regardless of their multiple identities.
Nevertheless, despite the significant progress made, Canadian civic and political structures, and indeed the teaching and learning of citizenship have been relatively slow to respond to many of the critiques launched by feminists, and other scholars concerned with equity and diversity in Canadian education (Hughes et al., 2010; Joshee, 2004, 2007; Peck, Sears, & Donaldson, 2008; Joshee & Johnson, 2007). In addition, there are a number of worrying trends that may not only endanger the progress made to date, but also rollback such efforts. With the progress made to expand universal access to education for girls and women around the globe, it is important to note however, that increasing access to education for girls does not necessarily lead to a societal transformation and an obstacle-free life for young women, nor does it improve the lives of women of all racial, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Global economic crises have put significant pressure on countries and prompted a wave of support for governments across the globe, leading massive cuts to federal programs in Canada, many of which were designed to support racialized minority communities, women and new Canadians (Woods, 2012). In addition, the current federal government, while leading the charge internationally for girls’ education and support for maternal and child health at the G20, has simultaneously closed 17 Status of Women offices around the country, cut funding for Status of Women programs and removed the language of gender equality as a key policy area (CBC News, 2006). This contradiction reaffirms the notion that gender inequality is a serious problem “over there”, but not in Canada.

The experiences of the seven young women in this project teach us important lessons about how gender is situated in citizenship learning in schools. They report having mostly taken up ideas of gender by learning about women suffragists and sexual reproduction, while skipping a more critical examination of systemic inequality and the continuation of gender role socialization, while simultaneously facing a sea of commodified, hyper-sexualized images of women outside of school. This contrast sends young women the message that they are valued more for their appearance and their “object-ness” rather than their citizenship of civic participation, and for their reproduction rather than their production and push for social change.
More substantially however, if young women who are active and critical thinking citizens, like the young women in this project, continue to conceptualize citizenship mostly in terms of their own individual civic responsibility and not in terms of their rights and entitlements, they might be socialized into accepting greater inequality and self-sacrifice at the expense of organizing to push for greater rights and entitlements from civic or political structures. This dilemma may be the dark side of John F. Kennedy’s famous speech: “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country”. While there is no doubt great value to our society, and to the girls; themselves, that these girls are engaged, purposeful and active citizens, there are other aspects to consider, such as stress, perfectionism, burnout and issues with emotional health. For example, should girls take on the majority of volunteerism, civic activities, community work and activism, while boys are excused from academic responsibilities to play sports and focus on athletic achievement, and student government?

The silencing of the concepts of rights in these girls’ discussions and photographs and the disconnect between what they are learning about their gender roles and their citizenship roles raises important considerations about the teaching and learning of citizenship in Canadian schools more broadly and its implications for the future roles that boys and girls play in Canadian society. We need more spaces in schools for students to engage with ideas of gender and citizenship. We need to give both boys and girls more opportunities to see themselves in our nation’s grand narrative and history and have more choices about how to envision their current and future participation in their families, schools, communities and civic and political life.

Through the perspectives of seven girls, we can learn a number of significant lessons about the ways in which we conceptualize citizenship and educate young people for their roles in Canadian society. They are aware that their experiences of being girl-citizens are shaped by their complex identities, such as their race, cultural background, religion, sexuality and gender. They talk about themselves and the ways they belong to their communities, to Canada and to the world as complex, sometimes contradictory and ever-evolving. They are able to draw on Yuval-Davis’s (1999) notion of a transversal politics, where they recognize the diversity and complexity within their group and the category of girls, while also
acknowledging the need and the benefits of sisterhood, solidarity, a sense of public good, and the need for continued collective action.

Though there is much diversity within the group of seven “citizen-girls”, they all agreed that they still receive gendered messages from their parents, schools and the popular media that they negotiate on a daily basis. Though the families of all the girls in Project Citizen-Girl were generally encouraging of their school achievements and civic activism, they seemed conflicted about some of the activities that were more overtly radical, feminist or motivated by social critique. Most parents did not place strict limits on their daughters’ movements or activities and demanded little from them in terms of contributing to household chores and responsibilities, a fact which obviously facilitated their active civic participation. At the same time, however, they also reinforced ideas of traditional femininity related to the girls’ dress, behavior and relationships.

The words of early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft appear as relevant today as they were in the 1700s. “It is useless to seek reform for women alone, without speaking about a general reformation of society” (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p. 311). In this difficult time, with competing pressures of shrinking budgets, global competitiveness and changing demographics, Canada needs greater attention to how citizenship concepts and structures reflect our changing population and help address issues of systemic inequality. It is now more than ever that we need to critically examine how our civic and political systems reflect all of our citizens. Further, it is crucial to ensure that gender is included in our public debate about citizenship in connection with race, class, culture, rather than erased by concerns about cultural diversity, multiculturalism or economic conditions. Finally, the experiences of the girls in Project Citizen-Girl have taught me that it is imperative that we help young people learn that social transformation and greater equality in Canadian society lie beyond the individual citizen’s actions. Indeed, there can be no major changes in our country without collective civic action.


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The situation of young women. (2011). United Nations. Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:9k1k4tOzCIUJ:social.un.org/youthyearer/docs/fact-sheet-girl-youngwomen.pdf+&hl=en&gl=ca&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESjqKtpe3z9YS7QMWGx980LvF6m2VCljfkdYDAI1vG6zcgAP5GzfJeHbDmYZy4qNYKsjG38L-4o-xu1wwJWfw2WzummnAeuvcOk2mG5yS30sKsveQBxgWpnoYdIPkgZSbjREG&sig=AHIEtbRKA-h7rUfE4JF1FaL4eOg6TnPYJA


Appendix A
Information Letter

STUDY: CITIZEN-GIRL: PERSPECTIVES OF GIRLS ON GENDER, RACE AND CITIZENSHIP IN ONTARIO

STUDY GOALS:
• I would like to hear from you. I would like to invite you to be involved in a study entitled Citizen-girl: Perspectives of Young Women on Citizenship in Ontario.
• The purpose of this study is to investigate more deeply your perspectives, experiences and stories about your learning to be a citizen in Ontario schools.
• This study will also explore how certain social factors (such as family beliefs, teachers, your family’s economic situation, your gender, your ethnic or racial identity, your religion) have shaped your beliefs and activities about being an active citizen of Canada. Your input would be invaluable and greatly appreciated.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?:
• I am recruiting a range of “civically active girls” aged 15-18 who have completed (or are completing) the Grade 10 Civics Course and are involved in a program that is specifically designed to involve girls and young women in a range of activities and issues to promote girls’ and women’s empowerment in society.
• The participants who want to join will be divided into two smaller groups, one aged 14-16 and the second, aged 15-21.
• I need the girls to be able to commit to attending 4-5 meetings over the next two months, to taking and sharing photographs and journal entries or scrapbooks with others and potentially a public forum (such as a photo exhibit).
• I need the participants to give their consent and if they are under 18, they must get their parents’ written consent as well.

STUDY PROCEDURES:
• I will ask you to participate in a brief interview and a series of group meetings (every two weeks, approx 2 hours each) over the next two months as well as taking photographs of your daily lives and recording your thoughts, feelings and impressions (in writing, blogging or a video) over the course of a month.
• You will be asked to take photographs of your lives, record your impressions in journals and share them with other young women.
• In the end of this study, you will be invited to share your photographs, drawings, journal entries and any other thoughts or artifacts in a public forum (in a photo exhibit or an online web-forum) as a way of sharing your valuable insights with other students, teachers and other interested parties.
• This is a participatory study and you are welcome to share your thoughts/suggestions and input throughout the process. We will decide on a final project as a group.
I WILL PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY:

• Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to answer only those questions with which you are comfortable.
• In addition, the responses will be destroyed as soon as the data has been coded and put into a computer data-base.
• The information gathered will be stored at a secure location at my home office and on my personal laptop computer. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons, schools, school districts, and communities cannot be identified, unless you consent to share it. All data collected will be used for the purposes of a Ph.D. thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

WHAT WE WILL DO WITH STUDY:

• As I mentioned earlier, your input is invaluable and would be greatly appreciated!
• We will share the information with other groups in a public forum, research articles, websites and other public spaces (conferences).
• Before any publications or exhibits, I will always get your consent. Nothing will be shared without the consent of the participants.
• The findings from this study will assist educators, policy makers, and others to make better sense of what it means to educate girls for citizenship, to improve the quality of civic education to better represent girls’ perspectives in Canadian schools.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS/CONCERNS:

• If you agree, please sign the letter below and return it to me in the envelope provided. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (416) 921-2181 or at leighing@hotmail.com.
• You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Reva Joshee at (416)-978-1515.
• Finally, you may also contact the U of T Office of Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. Please note that a summary of the findings will be sent to you, upon request, once the study is complete.

Sincerely,
Leigh-anne Ingram
Ph.D., Candidate
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
252 Bloor St West
Toronto, ON
M5S 1V6
Appendix B
Informed Consent Letter (Participant)

_________________(Name)
_________________(Date)

Dear _____________________(Participant)

I would like to hear from you. I would like to invite you to be involved in a study entitled *Citizen or Subject?: Perspectives of Young Women on Citizenship Learning in Ontario*. The purpose of this study is to investigate more deeply your experiences, thoughts and stories about your learning to be a citizen in Ontario schools. This study will also explore what social factors (such as family beliefs, teachers, your family’s economic situation, your gender, your ethnic or racial identity, your religion) have either encouraged or limited your civic action. Your input would be invaluable and greatly appreciated.

I will ask you to participate in a brief interview and a series of brief focus groups (1-½ hours each) to record your thoughts, feelings and impressions in a journal entry over the course of a month. You will be asked to take photographs of your lives, record your impressions in journals and share them with other young women. In the end of this study, you will be invited to share your photographs, journal entries and any other thoughts or artifacts in a public forum (in a photo exhibit or an online web-forum) as a way of sharing your valuable insights with other students, teachers and other interested parties.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to answer only those questions with which you are comfortable. In addition, the responses will be destroyed as soon as the data has been coded and put into a computer data-base. The information gathered will be stored at a secure location at my home office and on my personal laptop computer. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons, schools, school districts, and communities cannot be identified, unless you consent to share it. All data collected will be used for the purposes of a Ph.D. thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

As I mentioned earlier, your input is invaluable and would be greatly appreciated! The findings from this study will assist educators, policy makers, and others to make better sense of what it means to educate girls for citizenship, to improve the quality of civic education to better represent girls’ perspectives in Canadian schools. If you agree, please sign the letter below and return it to me in the envelope provided. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (416) 921-2181 or at leighanne.ingram@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Reva Joshee at (416)-978-1515. Finally, you may also contact the U of T Office of Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. Please note that a summary of the findings will be sent to you, upon request, once the study is complete.
Sincerely,

Leigh-anne Ingram, Ph.D., Candidate

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Please tick here to show that you have agreed to do the following:

Yes ☐ No ☐ I give my permission to the researcher (Leigh-Anne Ingram) to share my photographs and artifacts (journal entries, etc) with the researcher and the other research group.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I give my permission to the researcher (Leigh-Anne Ingram) to use my images, photographs of me and my journal entries in her thesis and any articles or presentations that she might make about this project.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I give my permission to the researcher (Leigh-Anne Ingram) to use my images/photographs, journal entries (selected by me) in a public forum (photo exhibit, museum display, website?).

Yes ☐ No ☐ I agree to make sure that any friends or family members who I may include in my images/photos also sign a consent form (Appendix E: Third party Consent Form).
Appendix C
Consent Letter (Parent)

_________________(Name)
_________________(Date)

Dear _____________________(Name of Parent)

I am currently a Ph.D. Student at University of Toronto in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning and I am inviting your daughter to participate in my study, entitled Citizen or Subject?: Perspectives of Young Women on Citizenship Learning in Ontario. The purpose of this study is to investigate more deeply her experiences, thoughts and stories about her learning to be a citizen in Ontario schools. This study will also explore what social factors that have either encouraged or limited her civic action. Your permission and support in this process would be invaluable and greatly appreciated.

I will ask your daughter to participate in a brief interview and a series of brief focus groups (1-½ hours each) to record her thoughts, feelings and impressions in a journal entry over the course of a month. She will be asked to take photographs of her daily life, recording her impressions in journals and sharing them with other young women. In the end of this study, she will be invited to share your photographs, journal entries and any other thoughts or artifacts in a public forum (in a photo exhibit or an online web-forum) as a way of sharing her valuable insights with other students, teachers and other interested parties.

Her participation is completely voluntary and she may choose to answer only those questions with which she is comfortable. In addition, the responses will be destroyed as soon as the data has been coded and put into a computer data-base. The information gathered will be stored at a secure location at my home office and on my personal laptop computer. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons, schools, school districts, and communities cannot be identified, unless you consent to share it. All data collected will be used for the purposes of a Ph.D. thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

As I mentioned earlier, your permission and support for your daughter’s permission is invaluable and would be greatly appreciated! The findings from this study will assist educators, policy makers, and others to make better sense of what it means to educate girls for citizenship, to improve the quality of civic education to better represent girls’ perspectives in Canadian schools. If you agree, please sign the letter below and return it to me in the envelope provided. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (416) 921-2181 or at leighanne.ingram@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Reva Joshee at (416)-978-1515. Finally, you may also contact the U of T Office of Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at
ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. Please note that a summary of the findings will be sent to you, upon request, once the study is complete.
Sincerely,

Leigh-anne Ingram, Ph.D. Candidate
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Please tick here to show that you have agreed to do the following:

Yes ☐ No ☐ I give my permission to my daughter to participate in the research conducted by the researcher (Leigh-Anne Ingram) entitled: “Citizen or Subject: Perspectives of Young Women on Citizenship Learning in Ontario.

Yes ☐ No ☐ If required, I give my permission to the researcher (Leigh-Anne Ingram) to use my images/photographs taken by my daughter for this project in a public forum (photo exhibit, museum display, website?).
Appendix D

Consent Form (Third Party)

_________________________(Name)

_________________________(Date)

Dear _________________________

(Third Party (Parent, Friend or other contact of Participant who might be included in images),

Your participation and assistance with my study is greatly appreciated and will help to contribute to our understanding of the educational and citizenship needs and experiences of girls and young women in Canada. I am a graduate student in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Department in Education Department at OISE/UT and am currently planning a research project that will involve girls and young women. In order to begin the project, I require your written consent. I am doing a research study entitled Citizen or Subject?: Perspectives of Young Women on Citizenship Learning in Ontario. The purpose of this study is to investigate more deeply the experiences, thoughts and stories of young women about their learning to be citizens in Ontario. Your input would be invaluable and greatly appreciated.

Participants will be asked to take photographs of their lives, record your impressions in journals and share them with other young women. In the end of this study, they will be invited to share their photographs, journal entries and any other thoughts or artifacts in a public forum (in a photo exhibit or an online web-forum) as a way of sharing their valuable insights with other students, teachers and other interested parties. In this process, they may also take photographs or images that include you.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to participate or not. You are being asked to give your permission to share the images of you with the research team, in academic journals or publications and in a public photo exhibit or website. You can choose to give your permission to participate in some or all of these things – it is completely up to you. You also have the choice to withdraw your participation at any point. The information gathered from both questionnaires and interviews will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location at my home office and on my personal laptop computer. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

The findings from this study will assist educators, policy makers, and others to make better sense of what it means to educate girls for citizenship, to improve the quality of civic education to better represent girls’ perspectives in Canadian schools. Your input is especially invaluable and would be greatly appreciated. If you agree, please sign the letter below and return it to me in the envelope provided. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (416) 921-2181 or at leighanne.ingram@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Reva Joshee at (416)-978-1515. Finally, you may also contact the U of T
Office of Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. Please note that a summary of the findings will be sent to you, upon request, once the study is complete.

Sincerely,

Leigh-anne Ingram, Ph.D., Candidate

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Please tick here to show that you have agreed to do the following:

Yes □ No □ I give my permission to the researcher (Leigh-Anne Ingram) to share my photographs and artifacts (journal entries, etc) with the researcher and the other research group.

Yes □ No □ I give my permission to the researcher (Leigh-Anne Ingram) to use my images, photographs of me and my journal entries in her thesis and any articles or presentations that she might make about this project.

Yes □ No □ I give my permission to the researcher (Leigh-Anne Ingram) to use my images/photographs, journal entries (selected by me) in a public forum (photo exhibit, museum display, website?).
Appendix E

Consent Form (Administrative/Organization)

_________________(Name)
_________________(Organization)
_________________(Date)

Dear _____________________

(Organizational Representative, EX: Plan Canada)

Your participation and assistance with my study is greatly appreciated and will help to contribute to our understanding of the educational and citizenship needs and experiences of girls and young women in Canada. I am a graduate student in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Department in Education Department at OISE/UT and am currently planning a research project that will involve girls that I will recruit through your organization. In order to begin the project, I require your written consent. I am doing a research study entitled Citizen or Subject?: Perspectives of Young Women on Citizenship Learning in Ontario. The purpose of this study is to investigate more deeply the experiences, thoughts and stories of young women about their learning to be citizens in Ontario. I appreciate your assistance in helping me find girls and young women to be participants in my study.

Participants will be asked to take photographs of their lives, record their impressions in journals and share them with other young women in the study. In the end of this study, they will be invited to share their photographs, journal entries and any other thoughts or artifacts in a public forum (in a photo exhibit or an online web-forum) as a way of sharing their valuable insights with other students, teachers and other interested parties. In addition, they may request that any information, whether in written form or audiotape, be eliminated from the project. Participants will at no time be judged or evaluated, and will at no time be at risk of harm.

I may be attending meetings or events at your organization with the girls and will be asking your help in contacting the girls, their families or other parties related to the participants. I will also be asking for your help with any documents or materials from your organization that are related to my study. I will only use materials and information that you have given me consent to use.

The information gathered from both questionnaires and interviews will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location at my home office and on my personal laptop computer. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons, schools, school districts, and communities cannot be identified. All data collected will be used for the purposes of a Ph.D. thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.
The findings from this study will assist educators, policy makers, and others to make better sense of what it means to educate girls for citizenship, to improve the quality of civic education to better represent girls’ perspectives in Canadian schools. As an organization that is committed to improving the lives and educational experiences of girls, your input is especially invaluable and would be greatly appreciated. If you agree, please sign the letter below and return it to me in the envelope provided. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (416) 921-2181 or at leighanne.ingram@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Reva Joshee at (416)-978-1515. Finally, you may also contact the U of T Office of Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. Please note that a summary of the findings will be sent to you, upon request, once the study is complete.
Sincerely,

Leigh-anne Ingram, Ph.D. Candidate
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

(Name and Signature of Organizational Representative )

Please sign here to show that you have agreed to do the following:

I give my permission to the researcher (Leigh-Anne Ingram) to attend relevant meetings with girls participating in our programs (EX: Girls’ Speaker Bureau) and agree to allow her to contact any girls already participating in our program.
Appendix F
Research Protocol (Individual Interview)

CITIZEN-GIRL: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PERSONAL BACKGROUND (FAMILY AND HOME)

FAMILY - Tell me your name and age, your grade, your school?
1. Can you tell me a little bit about your family, your neighborhood and where you live?
2. Can you tell me about your family background, where they come from (when did they move here) and anything you would like to say about them (cultural or ethnic or religious background).
3. Can you tell me about your family – who does what in the house?
4. In your family, do you think you and your brothers are treated differently, how?
5. Do you do chores/responsibilities in your home/family/community that you have to do regularly?
6. How do you feel about these responsibilities?
7. What about your mom and dad? Does your mom work outside the house?
8. Why do you think things are like that?
9. DO you think you will do things the same way when you grow up? Why or why not?

CIVIC PARTICIPATION
10. Are there any experiences or specific stories you would like that tell us a bit about your family? Cultural community?
11. Can you tell me about all the activities/groups that you belong to (inside and outside of school)?
12. Do you belong to any groups related to your cultural/ethnic community? What about your family – do you belong to any groups with your family related to your cultural background?

GIRLS/WOMENS’ RIGHTS
13. Can you tell me a bit about how and why you got involved with Because I’m a Girl and have an interest in girls/ women’s rights?
14. How long have you been part of BIAAG/working in girls’ or gender rights?
15. What are some experiences IN BIAAG that you’ve had that you thought were most memorable/valuable?
16. Anything you want to say about what you have learned by participating in BIAAG?
17. What do your parents/family think about your participation in BIAAG?
18. Is anyone else in your family involved in any activities related to women’s rights, global issues, social justice, Canadian national issues, your cultural community - etc?
GENDER/FEMALE
19. Male/Female (Masculine/Feminine) – what does it mean to you to be a male/female – what ideas, activities and behaviours can you think of when you think of men/women? And why?
20. What are some of the things you like most about being a girl? What are some of the things you like least? Why?
21. Can you think of an example of a situation in your life that shows the best/worst thing about being a girl?
22. Do you think that the roles that women and men have in society have changed over the last few decades, are they different from your parents’ generation/background? How?
23. Can you think of any specific examples of things/events in your life or around you that you think show some of the differences?
24. Do you think these differences are stereotypes or true? Why?
25. In your experience, do you think boys and girls are treated differently in your school?
26. Teachers treat differently/school books, etc? why/how?)
27. Do you think gender roles are different in Canada than in other places in the world? Do you have any experiences you would like to share about that?

CITIZENSHIP
28. Citizen – what does that mean to you?
   Citizenship – what does that mean to you in Canada? What concepts, actions, ideas, behaviours do you think of related to being a citizen of Canada? (rights and responsibilities)
29. Do you see yourself as identifying as being part of a community larger than Canada?
30. Where did you learn what it means to be a “Citizen”? (IN SCHOOL, home, community etc…)
31. Future interests- You’ve mentioned x activities- In the future, what kinds of issues do you think you would be interested in participating in? would you ever be interested in being an activist/politician/educator?

GENDER, CULTURE AND CITIZENSHIP IN SCHOOLS
32. What do you think you learned in school about being a good citizen? In what classes?
33. Did you talk in classes about the differences between men and women in society and their roles in society throughout history?
34. Do you ever talk about the differences between men and women in society today?
35. What did you learn about the history of feminism and women’s movements in Canada and around the world? - What did you learn?
36. Why do you think women did not have the same equal status as men?
37. How do you think that has changed?
38. Did you ever learn about other justice movements in history (civil rights, racial equality, multiculturalism etc…)?
39. When you were in social studies/history – did you talk about/texts – about different cultural communities within Canada and globally?
40. How do you think women’s contributions were represented throughout your schooling?
41. Can you think of any personal experiences you had in school about learning about women’s roles in history and society in Canada/globally?
42. What does it mean to you to be a feminist?
43. Would you describe yourself as a feminist? Why or why?
44. Can you think of any famous people who have fought for racial or gender equality in Canada/world?
45. Is there anything you wish you could have learned more about?
Appendix G
Research Protocol (Photovoice Group Meetings)

The first focus group will be an introduction to the study and the themes and goals of the study, as well as an attempt to build rapport and relationships between myself and the participants. In addition, it will be a basic introduction to photography and basic technical skill-building so participants will be able to take the photos for the photo-voice project.

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
1. Personal Background
2. Personal experiences and practices of citizenship
3. Experiences Learning “Citizenship” and “civic Participation”
4. Experiences Learning “girlhood” in Schools
5. Enabling Factors
6. Obstacles

I. PERSONAL BACKGROUND
1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where do you live?
4. What school do you go to?
5. What do you parents do?
6. Where are your parents/grandparents from?
7. What is your racial/ethnic/cultural/religious background?

II. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES OF CITIZENSHIP

(How do a group of young "Minoritized” women define civic participation?)
1. What groups do you belong to? (community, local, ethnic, religious, peer, school, global, transnational)

2. What activities do you participate in now?
   a. Family
   b. Housework/home
   c. Local community groups
   d. School groups
   e. Afterschool programs
   f. Local or national groups
   g. NGO/civil society groups (Plan Canada, etc).
3. What does civic participation mean to you?
4. What does it mean to you to be a “good citizen”?
5. What rights/responsibilities do citizens have in Canada?
6. What skills and knowledge does it take to be a full, active citizen?
7. Is there anything you didn’t learn that you wish you had learned?
8. In your experience of citizenship learning, were males and females represented equally?

III. EXPERIENCES LEARNING “CITIZENSHIP” AND “CIVIC PARTICIPATION”

1. Bring Civics and Social Studies Textbooks – have them critically engage with them
2. What did you learn in school about being a citizen of Canada?
3. Tell me about your Grade 10 Civics class – did you learn about the following topics:
   a. Formal politics (structures and processes)
   b. Participating in Local organizations/Community
   c. Gender roles in society
   d. The Feminist/woman’s movements
   e. Current issues and status of women
4. How many women do you see included in this textbook?
5. What was NOT included in your social studies/civic classes?

IV. EXPERIENCES LEARNING “GIRLHOOD” IN SCHOOLS

RESEARCH QUESTION: How do they perceive that their gender and cultural identity affects their ability to enact what they learned about citizenship and civic participation;

School content about gender and citizenship
1. IN your experience, did your teachers treat boys and girls differently, if so how?
2. What kinds of responsibilities/duties do you think females have to play in ______?
3. Did you learn about history of the women’s movement or feminism? If so, what did you learn?
4. What did you learn about role of women in country/Global community
5. What did you learn about women’s movement in the world?
6. What did you learn about famous women in community/country/nation/world
7. What did you learn about existing gender inequalities in world?
   What did you learn about human rights (and women’s rights in particular)
8. What did you learn explicitly about gender and how it shapes out lives?
9. Are you a feminist? Do you support feminism?
10. Do you participate in any political activities or organizations, government, or civil society advocacy politics
11. Do you believe that family, parenting, mothering, housework affects your ability (or women’s ability and/or interest in political activities? 

V. ENABLING/INHIBITING FACTORS

RESEARCH QUESTION: What factors encourage or inhibit them, as females from applying the concepts they learned in school about being a citizen?

1. What things help you to become a “good citizen” and apply what you learned in school about citizenship?

2. What things prevent you from being an active citizen? (i.e from parents, family, community, cultural, religious, etc)?
Appendix H
Research Protocol (Photovoice)

PHOTOVOICE

After the first focus group, participants will be given disposable cameras and will be asked to take photos documenting their daily lives and answering the following questions:

1. Images of what a “good” citizen looks like (skills, acts, behaviours, activities showing a good citizen”).

2. Images of “good girl” - female roles/male roles (showing a good female/male)