

**“It’s About Us!”: Racialized Minority Girls’ Transformative Engagement in
Feminist Participatory Action Research**

by

Sandrine de Finney
B.A., University of Victoria

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the School of Child and Youth Care
Faculty of Human and Social Development

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University of Victoria

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ABSTRACT

The sociocultural, economic, and political participation of girls has become a prevalent focus of policy, research, and practice. Despite their increasing visibility in the demographic composition of Canadian society, however, racialized minority girls remain largely invisible in these debates. Monolithic discourses of girl power, 'at risk' girls, youth participation and feminist activism do not account for the complex and uneven ways in which minority girls engage as knowledge producers, advocates, and community participants within cultural contexts that foster the depoliticization and social exclusion of young women of colour. Minority girls face intersecting barriers to civic participation and social inclusion 'on their own terms' related to race, gender, age, citizenship, language, class and religion, among other factors.

As rapid global change reconfigures girls' local realities and thus, their practices of engagement, our traditional models and discourses of participation must be expanded. To problematize the relations of power under which minority girls constitute their practices of engagement and community building, I constructed a transdisciplinary conceptual framework grounded in postcolonial and transnational feminist theories.

The research examined minority girls' practices of 'transformative engagement' (TE) in a collaborative, community-based, feminist Participatory Action Research project

entitled “It’s About Us.” The study was based in Victoria, British Columbia, a predominantly Euro-Western Canadian city. “It’s About Us” responded to minority girls’ requests for a minority- and girl-centered epistemic space from which to explore their experiences of gendered racialization. Expressive methods including popular theatre, photography, and art served as vehicles for their engagement. The iterative feminist research design yielded data garnered from focus groups, theatre sessions, and scripts, participant-observation, journaling and photo-ethnography. This design provided the enabling conditions to deepen and sustain the girls’ practices of oppositional agency and thus the emergence of transformative engagement.

I developed an Interpretive Spiral Model (ISM) to extricate the difficulties of translating a feminist conceptual framework into a sustainable, girl-centered project. My findings characterize transformative engagement as a multisited, precarious, generative form of praxis, rather than a formulaic process with guaranteed outcomes. I propose that the facilitation of transformative engagement entails four intersecting strategies: border crossing into exclusionary spaces, resources, and lines of power; developing safe, strategic communities of belonging; producing disruptive, critical knowledge; and engaging in public and social action.

Overall, the girls’ strategies of transformative engagement reveal a spectrum of subversive, deeply contextualized, multifaceted feminisms congruent with their own needs and experiences. The transformative engagement process resulted in multiple successful outcomes including theatre and conference presentations, media and website productions, and, most notably, contribution to the creation of a network of over 100 racialized girls and women called Anti-dote. The research findings illustrate how girl-centered, feminist action research can provide avenues to support minority girls’ unique practices of resistance and social change, and feature their voices more prominently in community, policy, research, and practice.

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CHAPTER 1:

“IT’S ABOUT US”: ENGAGING FOR TRANSFORMATION

We’re here to talk about our reality, our cultures, and racism and stuff like that. We want to show how we can deal with that better, to help girls deal with that better, or speak against the racism there is ... what we experience everyday. So this project was a way to do that ourselves, to have girls helping other girls, just to make sure that information is out there so people understand. (Taisha, 16, “It’s About Us” participant-researcher)

Girlhood in Flux

Globalization and transnationalism are producing rapid economic, political, historical, and sociocultural changes with new borders, symbolic spheres and sites of representation. These shifts demand critical analysis for girl-centered research, policy, and practice. Increasingly mobile intersections of knowledge and communities raise new concerns for how girls are constituted, and how they constitute themselves, at the nexus of competing claims about their bodies, identities, social locations, and political and economic roles. Media headlines (“Girls Gone Wild!”, “Gurl Power”, “Tween Super Shoppers”, “Girl Gangs”, “Teen Sexual Predators”, “Mean Girls”) reveal a fascination with girls as consumers, sexual beings, cultural producers, young women, and citizens. This preoccupation brings to the fore an ideologically charged debate about who girls are in late modernity.

The past twenty years have seen a proliferation of literature mapping the changing conditions under which contemporary girlhoods are crafted.¹ The terrain of girlhood studies is rapidly emerging and continuously renegotiated; ‘girlhood’ is itself a contested space, deeply fissured by the politics of representation. Jiwani, Steenbergen, and Mitchell (2006) point out that:

¹ Artz & Hoskins, 2005; Bettis & Adams, 2005; Gonick, 2003; Handa, 2003; Harris, 2005, 2006; Jiwani et al., 2006; Lalik & Oliver, 2005; Lee, 2005; Mikel-Brown, 2005; Torres, 1999.

the very word 'girl' is highly context-specific: it can connote community and inclusiveness among friends ("one of the girls"; "you go girl!") or denote status (little girl, young girl, older girl). It is an index of age. It can also be an insult ("you throw like a girl"), condescension ("the girls at the office"), or a term of endearment. Overlapping definitions—coupled with often-contradictory meanings—illustrate that 'girl' is a far more complicated word (and identity) than many acknowledge (p. x).

While definitions of girlhood vary greatly across countries, cultures, communities, and contexts, the United Nations' definition of the 'girl child' as a female under the age of 18 is becoming the accepted global marker of girlhood. A universal concept of girlhood, however, erases nuances of difference among and between girls. Leadbeater, Ross, and Way (1996), Fine (2004), and Griffin (2004) concur that the field of girl studies remains partially blind to certain girls' experiences. The dominant Anglocentric perspective, Griffin (2004) argues, "does not reflect the diversity of girls' lives, the complexity of the contemporary constitution of girlhood, or the ways in which such a construction of girlhood works to manage or handle that diversity" (p. 31). The conflation of differences among and between girls shapes a rocky landscape within which racialized minority girls must craft their identities according to acceptable and unacceptable measures of 'difference.' Globalization does not have seamless or even impacts on the lives of all girls. Some—specifically, poor, minority and Indigenous girls—are rendered more vulnerable by economic and sociocultural discourses, policies, practices, and systems that mediate girlhood. Fine (2004) observes:

Rising rates of arrest, incarceration and un and under-employment among young women are a troubling counterpoint to images of over-achieving, consumer-oriented girlpower. While some privileged young women are indeed reaping the benefits of new opportunities, those without economic or social capital are slipping through the ever-widening holes in what remains of our social safety nets. Young women appear to have it all, and yet many constitute those hardest hit by the effects of the new global political economy on jobs, resources and economy. How do they survive and flourish in a world of greater choices and opportunities, but fewer structures of support (p. xvii)?

What are the implications of these drastically unequal girlhoods for research, policy, and practice?

First, in this new context the sociocultural, economic, and political participation of girls has gained saliency. The need to make girls' concerns more visible and to infuse their voices into policy development was highlighted by the United Nations' declaration of the 1990s as 'the decade of the girl child.' In 2007, the UN Commission on the Status of Women made girls the focus of its international talks.

Despite their increasing visibility in the demographic composition of Canadian society, however, racialized minority girls remain poorly understood and engaged in these debates. Monolithic discourses of girl power, 'at risk' girls, youth participation and feminist activism do not account for the complex and uneven ways in which minority girls engage as knowledge producers, advocates, and community participants within cultural contexts that foster the depoliticization and social exclusion of young women of colour. Minority girls face intersecting barriers to civic participation and social inclusion 'on their own terms' related to race, gender, age, citizenship, language, class and religion, among other factors.

As rapid global change reconfigures girls' local realities and thus, their practices of engagement, our traditional models and discourses of participation must be expanded. A more differentiated analysis of modern girlhood would examine the barriers faced by minority girls in building citizenship and belonging in a rapidly shifting Canadian context. Given gaps in dominant Euro-Western-centric psychological models of theory and practice, more critical tools are needed to engage with the intersecting social forces that shape minority girls' lives. As Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) argue, "a new phase of 'girls' studies' is needed: one which grapples with theorizing the changing conditions under which young women's diverse self-making occurs" (p. 7). My conceptualization of girls' transformative engagement (TE) contributes to this emerging

field of girlhood studies with praxis that problematizes minority girls' engagement and social belonging in a context of rapidly evolving global change.

Relevance of the Study

This study examines the concept, process and outcomes of transformative engagement (TE) through "It's About Us," a community-based participatory action research (PAR)² project. "It's About Us" used popular theatre (PT) to explore the lived experiences of racialized minority girls. In my analysis of this study, I propose that feminist PAR (FPAR)—especially when facilitated through PT and other expressive and participatory mediums—can provide enabling conditions to support girls' transformative engagement. By exposing some of the inner workings of feminist community-based research by and with girls, I consider how feminist researchers and practitioners might more fully engage with racialized minority girls' lived realities and cultural knowledges by drawing on methodologies and analytical frameworks that promote girls' TE.

One objective of my exploration of TE is to theorize the role that context and locality play in mediating girls' social belonging and practices of resistance. My model teases out the problematics of engagement in a sociocultural context that structures racialized minority girls as outsiders. My focus is exploring how minority girls carve out niches of belonging in spaces that are "determined and sometimes over-determined" by social forces inscribed with dominant "dictates, social norms and mores and ways of seeing the world" (Jiwani et al., 2006, p. xi). Questioning the flat, absolutist measures of participation that have predominated research in this area serves to highlight structural barriers to the meaningful engagement of minority girls in social systems and institutions such as schools, recreational centers, social services, and local media. Similar barriers

² See Chambers, 2002; Fals-Borda, 1987, 1996; Hall, 1978, 1992, 1993, 2000a; Maguire, 1987; McTaggart, 1991, 1997; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall & Jackson, 1993; Tandon, 2002; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 1997, 2001; and Weis & Fine, 2004.

have been identified in comparable research studies in Canada and other Euro-Western countries which investigate the experiences of racialized minority youth and/or girls who grow up in predominantly White communities.³

Debates about social inclusion and engagement of minority girls are particularly relevant to expanding discourses, policies, and practices of multiculturalism in Canada. A distinguishing feature of my research is its relevance for several demographic and sociocultural trends related to Canadian girlhoods and, in particular, to minority girls. Visible minority and immigrant youth are among the fastest growing groups in Canada. These trends have important implications for transforming the landscape not only of Canadian cities, but of youth- and girl-centered policy, research, and practice. Amid debates about youth disengagement and the growing social exclusion and ghettoization of urban ethnic-minority populations in Canadian cities, girls from marginalized populations such as Indigenous, immigrant, and ethnic minority communities, have been identified by national organizations as urgent priorities for research, policy, and programming.⁴

History and Context

The “It’s About Us” study was located in Victoria, B.C., a mid-sized, predominantly Euro-Western city. The research team consisted of six teenaged girls, three University of Victoria researchers, and a theatre director. All of the participants in our research team identify as racialized minority and/or Indigenous girls and women. The project was a partnership between our research team and a local settlement agency, the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA), where I also worked as a youth worker.

³ See, for example, Ahmed (1999); Campbell (2002); Carrington & Short (1993); Connolly (2000); Fine, Stewart, & Zucker (2000); Gillborn (1996); Handa (2002); Kakembo (1994); Kaomea (2003); Kelly (1998); Lewis (2001); MacPhee (n.d.); Poteet (2001); Varma-Joshi, Baker, & Tanaka (2004).

⁴ This is discussed in detail in Chapter 10.

The PT project was embedded in a larger four-year community-based PAR research study with over 100 racialized girls and young women living in Victoria. This study involved an interdisciplinary research team with Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Associate Professor in the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Victoria, as principal investigator. The larger study included three phases: an exploratory focus group phase; a participatory phase that included the "It's About Us" theatre project and girls' conference; and a post-research implementation phase. Although I acted as research director throughout the four-year study, my doctoral work draws specifically on data that emerged from the design and development of the theatre project, in which I acted as lead researcher.

"It's About Us" built on findings from the initial phase of Dr. Lee's research project, in which she investigated racialized minority girls' processes of citizenship and identity formation in Victoria, a city located at the nexus of rapidly shifting global relations and growing cultural hybridity. Unlike the major metropolitan centers of Vancouver, Toronto, or Montreal, Victoria's visible minorities constitute a fraction of the population. According to census data obtained by Statistics Canada (2002), Victoria's population in 2001 consisted of 18.76% immigrants and 8.86% visible minorities. These figures are lower than the provincial averages of 26% and 21.62% respectively, and substantially lower than Vancouver's numbers of 37.54% immigrants and 36.88% visible minorities. Given the uneven representation of non-European Canadians in Victoria, my use of the 'minority' designation characterizes a demographic as well as a sociocultural, political, and economic status.

Lee's study revealed that cities with a dominant Euro-Western demographic makeup typically lack accessible community structures and services that respond to the needs and realities of racialized Indigenous and minority girls.⁵

In larger multicultural and metropolitan urban centres, the historical and continuing presence of large ethno-cultural communities have built an extensive network of organizations, services, and a certain level of awareness. In less cosmopolitan contexts, we cannot assume the presence of a network of community-based organisations that offer services to minority and Indigenous youth and, in particular, girls (2004a, p. 12).

Lee's study confirms the important difference that context and locality make in amplifying or mediating the effects of Whiteness. The following quote from 16-year-old Prisha, a Victoria resident and a participant in "It's About Us," articulates the systematic silencing of her Muslim identity:

Okay, in Victoria, we're totally isolated, it's totally different from a bigger city like Vancouver, here we have our own realities, our own issues 'cause it's so white here! We never see many girls like us, like from our own backgrounds or our own religions. For me, I'm Muslim, and I never get to talk about that, it's so sad but true, it's totally not there in my life here, except with my family or ... a few friends. Other than that I just always have to explain it if I want to talk about it, it's never just normal, you know? Like we always have to be telling the other girls, but I never just get to talk about being Muslim. It just feels like there's no places to go and talk about this stuff, just be ourselves, without having to explain ... even the school counsellors don't understand, they just don't get it ... and it's so frustrating to go through life like that!

Prisha's feelings of invisibility highlight the complex ways in which the experiences of girls and women are mediated by structural, material, and historical forces that define the borders of social engagement, belonging, and marginalization. To address these narratives of inclusion and exclusion, our team of participant-researchers (girls and women) worked within a theoretical framework that illuminated the processes and structures involved in constructing girls' identities in a context of neocolonialism,

⁵ See Lee 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006.

globalization, and transnationalization. We wanted to understand girls' experiences of (un)belonging and engagement in greater depth and determine how we could explore approaches by which girls could become meaningfully engaged in advocacy and community development. We chose popular theatre (PT) as our methodology because its collaborative, expressive, and action-focused practices seemed an appropriate medium to facilitate an interactive exploration of our research questions. We drew primarily on the Theatre of the Oppressed model developed by Brazilian dramatist and educator Augusto Boal (Boal, 1979, 1990, 1992; Ferrand, 1995; Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994). To further animate the principles of PT, we employed multimedia methods that included improvisation, art, photo-drama, public education, and peer advocacy.⁶

“It’s About Us”

During one of our earliest research sessions, a spirited discussion ensued among the girls about the goals and meaning of creating a space “just for girls” to “talk about our stuff.” The girls decided to name the project “It’s About Us” to reflect their desire to place their own voices, personal experiences, and goals for community change at the center of the project. The project title made a powerful statement, given the girls’ experiences of erasure and exclusion within Victoria’s predominantly White cultural context. As the following quotes from Taisha and Manjeet illustrate, the theatre project grew from their commitment to create avenues for racialized minority girls to become involved in peer support, mentoring, and public advocacy.

I suggested the name “It’s About Us” because girls need our own place to talk about girl stuff, our own experiences of what it’s like, for me, moving here from another country and all my daily life experiences.... Girls need places where we can help each other, meet other girls like us, support and teach each other, and ... let other girls know that they’re not just alone going through that, we are too. (Taisha, 16)

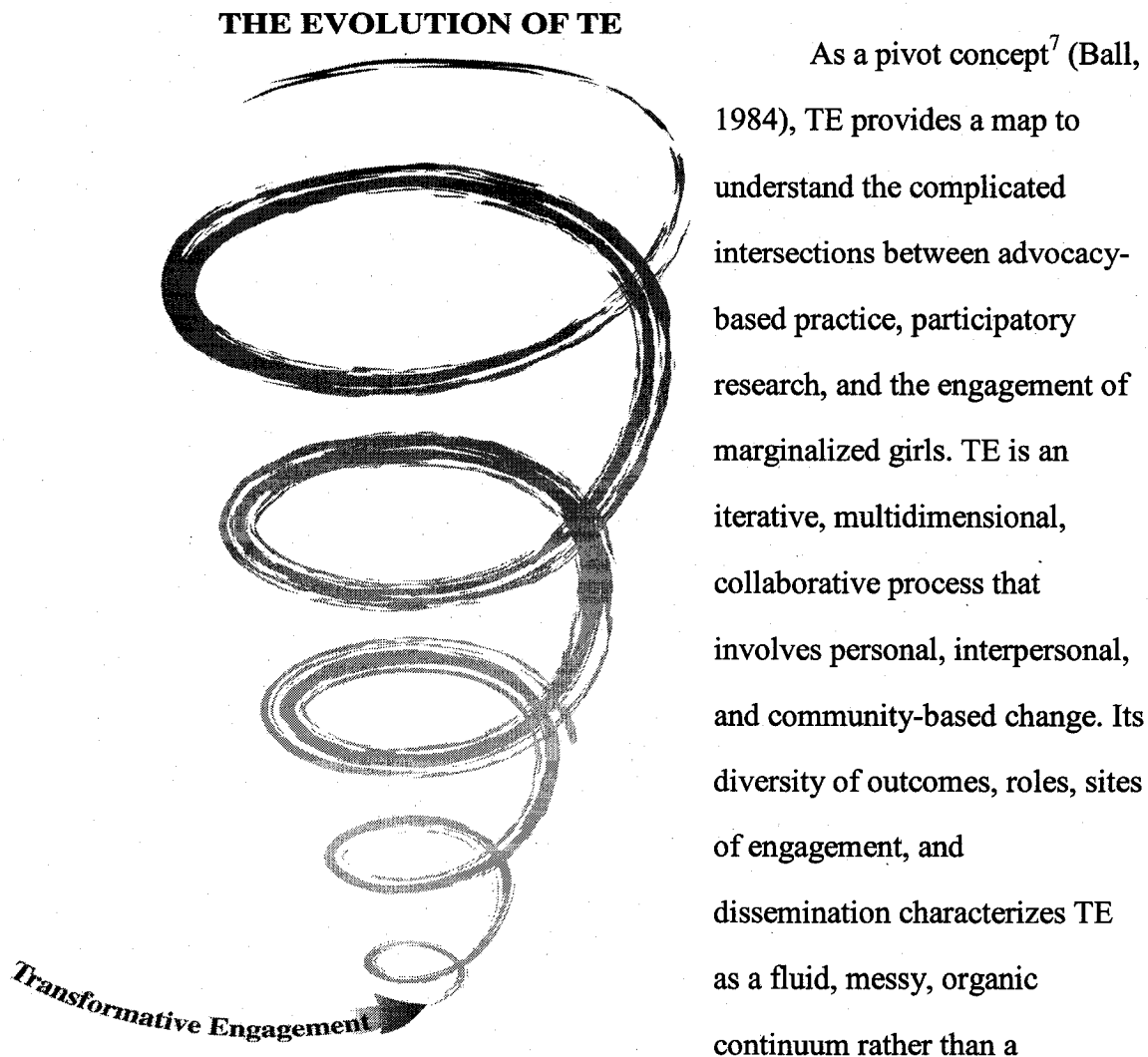
⁶ Our application of PT is discussed in further detail in Chapter 7.

We need to get out there and raise the level of education about our own lives 'cause they just don't know, the counsellor, teachers, politicians, they don't know what our lives are like, what we need. So yeah, we *need* to be out there speaking up for ourselves and making change. (Manjeet, 17)

In the passages above, Taisha and Manjeet describe elements of what I conceptualize as transformative engagement (TE). In "It's About Us," I experienced how expressive, action-based, and participatory approaches can help to transform racialized girls' and women's experiences of disengagement, marginalization, and silencing, including my own. After the study, I surveyed my data for an overarching concept that would articulate some of the promising practices and outcomes of our unique approach and intertwine the threads of inquiry with which my research is concerned. I looked for models and language to help me conceptualize the complex interplay between issues related to girls' voices and engagement; girls' gendered racialization; feminist, participatory action research; social change; community development; dominant Whiteness, and community-based, girl-centered practice. I knew that our project design had provided the enabling conditions to deepen and sustain the girls' practices of oppositional agency and thus the emergence of TE. But other questions presented themselves: What processes sustained girls' investment in an extremely demanding collaborative participatory process? What enabling conditions supported and intensified their commitment to practices of resistance and social change? How do the principles of FPAR become translated into meaningful, sustainable, girl-centered research? My investigation of the praxis of TE problematizes the nature and quality of the processes that result in transformational outcomes for racialized minority girls and women.

Transformative Engagement

Figure 1.1 The evolution of transformative engagement.



deterministic or formulaic process with guaranteed outcomes. For instance, the girls employed a range of nuanced engagement and disengagement strategies not easily encapsulated by monolithic representations of empowerment and vulnerability. Their agency was nonetheless always exerted within what Ralston (1998) calls ‘constrained spaces.’ As such, my analysis focuses on how minority girls demonstrate a specific

⁷ I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Jessica Ball, for suggesting the use of a pivot concept.

iteration of agency—purposeful, oppositional, transformative, grassroots, advocacy based, and infused with anti-racism, anti-colonial, and feminist principles—within structural constraints, even when they have limited opportunities or venues to do so on their own terms. Ideally, by putting girls’ own voices and concerns at the forefront of inquiry, the process of TE engenders social action and community development for and by girls. Community development initiatives supported by “It’s About Us” include a girls’ conference and advisory committee and the community-based organization Antidote. These initiatives all provide avenues for featuring girls’ voices more prominently in community, policy, practice, and research initiatives.

I propose that the praxis of TE entails four intersecting strategies: (1) border crossing into exclusionary spaces, resources, and lines of power; (2) creating safe, strategic communities of belonging, including community networking and peer and intergenerational mentoring; (3) producing disruptive, critical knowledge; and (4) a sustained investment in community-based action, including policy and programming development, that is grounded in the needs and realities of participants. I argue that these four strategies—border crossing, community building, critical knowledge production, and action—are essential to actualize the promise of girl-centered, FPAR.

Focus of the Dissertation

In the 16 chapters of this dissertation, I explicate the following four research questions:

1. Under what circumstances, and with what outcomes and challenges, can participatory, expressive, and action-based feminist research become a site for the transformative engagement of racialized minority girls?

2. How do the particular social locations of racialized minority girls as gendered, racialized, classed, sexualized, and nationalized subjects mediate their experiences of TE?
3. What conceptual, theoretical, and practical dilemmas do multipositioned researcher-practitioners such as myself face in facilitating TE?
4. What are the implications of my research findings for how we conceptualize and work with racialized minority girls within the field of applied youth work?

Despite the many positive outcomes of our study, I intentionally situate my claims about TE within a problematization of FPAR. PAR researchers, particularly those who take a feminist approach, generally understand that no inherently transformative or emancipatory way exists to engage critical theories, participatory and creative research tools, and feminist principles to engender social change. In reality, the process of translating research outcomes into sustained gains is unpredictable, tremendously challenging, and fraught with theoretical, conceptual, and practical contradictions. For example, our research team's application of PAR at times obscured or replicated problematic colonial and patriarchal structures and restricted opportunities for participatory social change. Throughout my analysis, I offer reflections on the complexity and uncertainty involved in collaborative research, the overlapping tensions and dilemmas that challenge participant-researchers, and, most of all, the community contexts and networks that shape transformative research experiences.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation weaves together a number of conceptual, theoretical, and practice-related threads from different disciplines and contextualizes them in relation to my own professional field of child and youth care.

In Chapter 2, I explore the emerging effects of postcolonialism and transnationalism on new dilemmas facing girls of color. I demonstrate that my work is necessarily transdisciplinary because no one field adequately represents the unique situation of racialized girls as knowledge producers, advocates, and community leaders at the convergence of complex global systems and predominantly White localities.

Through a literature review on conceptualizations of girls in Chapters 3 and 4, I begin to map a transdisciplinary theoretical framework. My survey in Chapter 3 of current research on girls argues that racialized minority girls are both under- and misrepresented in psychosocial studies of youth, as well as in the emerging field of girlhood/girl studies. I argue for language and practices that acknowledge the socially constituting effects of psychosocial categories on girls' identities and on our practices of research and service provision. In Chapter 4, I draw on an intersectional feminist analytical framework grounded in postcolonial and transnational feminist theories as a counterpoint to the identified gaps in dominant research related to girls. By making room for multiple trajectories of girlhood, I attend to the complex social and historical processes of colonialism, racialization, and gendering that shape girls' lived experiences in unequal ways. I also highlight structural barriers to the full representation of minority girls in research and to their meaningful engagement in social systems and institutions such as schools, recreational centers, social services, and local media.

In Chapter 5, I provide an overview of Dr. Lee's larger research project and describe the design of "It's About Us." I locate my doctoral work within the philosophies and goals that guided the research design of the overall project. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Dr. Lee's findings inform my conceptualization of girls' identity formation and social belonging within the sociocultural context of Victoria. The chapter also describes the recruitment and development of the research team and outlines logistical and procedural aspects of the project. I foreground the implications of our use of terms

such as ‘participant-researcher,’ ‘girls,’ and ‘women’ in constructing our identities and roles within the research.

Chapters 6 and 7 present a survey of the diverse histories and applications of our two main research methodologies, PAR and PT. I lay the groundwork for exploring one of the main questions of my dissertation, that is, whether PAR and PT, when couched in broader principles of decolonization and feminist community development, can engender transformative engagement for and by racialized minority girls living at the intersection of transnational change and dominant Whiteness. I problematize some of the gaps in participatory, community-based, feminist action research in relation to women’s and girls’ access to research and modes of knowledge production and social change, and I discuss the challenges and benefits of using these approaches to engage racialized minority girls in a process of personal and social transformation.

Chapters 8 and 9 describe my data interpretation process, which is rooted in participatory and feminist models for data interpretation. Here I address dilemmas in interpretation in PAR related to knowledge production and ownership, research outcomes, validity, and engagement. In Chapter 9 I describe the development and application of a fluid, multi-method data interpretation model—an ‘Interpretive Spiral Model’ or ISM—which I devised to be consistent with the design and principles of my research.

Chapters 10 to 15 focus on data interpretation and the presentation of study findings. In these chapters, I illustrate how my ISM helps to extricate the factors that sustain, or jeopardize, girls’ experiences of TE. Chapter 10 provides an overview of the research findings and conceptualizes TE, raising relevant conceptual dilemmas that are explored in the following chapters. Chapters 11 to 15 problematize the four intersecting strategies of TE—border crossing, community building, critical knowledge, and action—that emerged through the processes of PAR and PT. To fully characterize the promises

and the challenges involved in promoting girls' TE, I discuss some of the conceptual, theoretical, philosophical, and practical dilemmas we faced throughout our project. I draw on postcolonial, transnational feminist, and girlhood studies to contextualize and historicize how a predominantly White cultural context structures girls' narratives of identity, social belonging, and agency, and, most importantly, their experiences of TE. My discussion of TE also contends with the difficulty of translating a theoretically complex feminist, anti-racist analytical framework into a research process congruent with girls' realities and needs.

Finally, Chapter 16 describes the significance of my study findings for informing theoretical and practice debates in the fields of applied girl and youth work. This discussion is not intended as a prescription. Instead, I invite researchers and practitioners to engage with the dilemmas presented and to consider their implications for how we conceptualize and work with racialized minority girls. These discussions are critical for engaging with the increasingly diverse and layered social contexts in which girls live and in which we research and practice.

CHAPTER 2:
THEORIZING THE CHANGING CONTEXTS OF GIRLHOOD:
POSTCOLONIAL AND TRANSNATIONAL EFFECTS

Despite our diverse locations and backgrounds, the girls and women of the “It’s About Us” research team share an experience of living across multiple borders in a context of ongoing colonial history. Jiwani (1997) argues that European colonization, though it yielded vastly different embodiments and impacts across borders and societies, constitutes a global narrative:

The reality of colonialism indicates that up to 85% of the world population was colonized by colonial powers (Said, 1979). Colonization entailed the destruction of Indigenous communities and economies, knowledge bases, the transmission of knowledge over time, spiritual beliefs, and political forms of self-governance. Colonization transformed the world as it existed. In most areas of the world which were colonized, European educational systems, European languages, and European forms of social, political and economic systems were imposed (Jiwani, 1997, p. 5).

The majority of the world’s citizens are postcolonial subjects in the sense that our identities and our sociocultural, economic, and political systems are mediated, in some way, through the ongoing effects of European colonialism (Nandy, 1989). European colonialism was a foundational precursor to the current iterations of postcolonialism, globalization, and transnationalism with which my research—and this chapter—are concerned. Therefore any discussion of social justice and transformative research must address the history by which colonial empires, in the name of science, progress, and civilization, shaped a social system that instituted Whiteness as its normalized center and Otherness as its subaltern counterpart.

The transition from modernism and colonialism into postmodernism and postcolonialism is jagged and rife with tensions. As minority and Indigenous researchers move in from the margins offering powerful counter narratives, they directly challenge

modernist claims of absolutisms. Postcolonial epistemologies are increasingly claimed as subversions against the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism. Metaphors of multiplicity, hybridity, and transience (i.e., transnationalism, translolality, transgenderism, transculturalism, etc.) are replacing fixed categories of identity that portray cultural formations and social systems as innate, inclusive entities that can be quantified, described, compared, and contrasted (Kaomea, 2003; Pratt, 2002). My discussion of minority girlhood takes place in a context fraught with uneasy relationships among the legacies of European colonialism, Indigenous epistemologies of resistance and renewal, constantly evolving ethnic-minority diasporas, and the policies and practices of state-sponsored multiculturalism. All major Canadian cities, including Victoria, which clings to its popular representation as a colonial vestige, are shaped by contradictory collisions between their colonial histories and the inescapable realities of modern global diversity. This state of flux creates paradoxical spaces for girls of colour. The lives of the girls in "It's About Us" are increasingly mediated by multilayered postcolonial contexts, characterized both by a lingering colonial legacy and by counter movements of resistance and decolonization. It is to this latter movement that I seek, with this research, to contribute praxis for social change.

This chapter lays out my argument for models of research and practice that more fully account for the transformation of minority girlhoods in a context of rapid global change. Here I argue that (1) global migration and population changes are disrupting predominantly White Euro-Western demographics, in the process producing new sites of identification and subject formation for minority girls; (2) that the impact of these formations on the everyday lives of minority girls has yet to be substantively examined and recorded in research; and (3) that traditional Euro-Western psychosocial theories of girlhood must be rethought and expanded in light of these conceptual gaps.

In this section I describe two phenomena, postcolonialism and transnationalism, which underlie global change and which, I argue, are critical to framing the emerging realities of minority girlhoods. This discussion sets the stage for my critique of psychosocial and girlhood theories. Like the feminist psychologists Brown and Gilligan, I seek to develop a reconceptualization of girls' engagement that provides "space for a girl to speak in her own voice and thus refuse the established story of a White, middle-class heterosexual woman's life, a story all girls in this culture—whether they are White or of colour, rich or poor, heterosexual or lesbian—struggle against, albeit in different ways" (1992, p. 15). As underscored by Brown and Gilligan, prevailing and sanctioned representations of race, gender, sexuality, and agency have direct bearing on how minority girls understand their roles as civic participants. These representations are dominated by Euro-Western psychological frameworks that define, operationalize, and compartmentalize dimensions of identity. Erasures of alternative accounts of girlhood in Euro-Western psychosocial frameworks should be an issue of serious concern for youth and girlhood theorists and practitioners. One significant gap is the absence in psychosocial research of transdisciplinary theory and debate that draws forth applications, concerns, and foci of postcolonialism and transnationalism (Connolly, 2000; Fine, Stewart, & Zucker, 2000; Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997; Giroux, 1993; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 1997, 2001; Winddance-Twine, 1996). In this chapter and the one that follows, I hope to articulate what these omissions mean for applied youth- and girl-centered research.

Postcolonialism, Transnationalism, and Girlhood

As transnational and postcolonial movements transform nation states and societies and, by extension, girls' local realities, we need a more multilayered language of globalization. Clifford (1997) observes that new conceptual territories like 'the border,'

the ‘postcolonial,’ the ‘transnational,’ and ‘hybridity’ are required to meet the challenges of increasing cultural, economic, political, and social flows. But what are postcolonialism and transnationalism, and how are these processes transforming girls’ consciousness and creating new dilemmas for minority girls’ civic participation and citizenship formation?⁸

Postcolonialism

As a historical process or current, postcolonialism explicates concerns and phenomena related to the ongoing effects and transitions out of European colonialism. Postcolonialism puts forth a variety of political, social, economic, and cultural transformations in response to persistent, and newly emerging colonialisms, as well as to embodiments of resistance against them. At its simplest, postcolonialism is an epochal term that describes a transition in the shape and substance of colonialism (for instance, through the independence of former colonies) and the ensuing rise of post-, neo-, and counter-colonialisms. As such, postcolonialism is not concerned merely with describing the effects of colonial dominance through economic, political, and sociocultural formations, but also with making visible that which responds to, resists, and transcends it. I would argue, however, that in its many manifestations, ‘post’ implies no definitive break from colonialism. We do ourselves a disservice by attempting to concretely periodize postcoloniality. We might better ask ourselves, “In what sense are we now situated ‘after’ coloniality in the sense of coloniality being ‘over and done with’? What about the ‘colonial’ is over, and for whom” (Frankenburg & Mani, 1996, p. 276)? The chronopolitics of colonialism and postcolonialism are hotly debated because incarnations of postcoloniality, and shifts from colonial to postcolonial formations, are never absolute or complete, and are shaped by regional, contextual, historic, and social particularities.

⁸ While I describe their theoretical debates and applications in the next chapter, here I focus on describing postcolonialism and transnationalism as historical *processes* or *conditions* that are driving the global changes with which my study is concerned.

I offer three examples. Britain can, to some degree, track its shifts away from territorialized economic and political imperialism, yet maintains 'post'-colonial relationships of power through the trade of capital, labour, and resources to and from its former and existing colonies. Canada, paradoxically a colony and a colonial power, remains fissured by its outstanding national sovereignty issues with Aboriginal peoples and its problematic discourse of multiculturalism that attempts to manage all Other diversities outside the settler/Aboriginal dichotomy. Finally, the United States, a former colony, has emerged as a global superpower, engaged in its own exercise of cultural, economic, and military neocolonialism.

As these examples demonstrate, no smooth or linear transition leads out of colonialism and into noncolonialism. Postcolonialism exists alongside, in relation to, outside, and in resistance to colonialism. What postcolonialists *can* claim to bring about, however, are substantive political, economic, and cultural discursive shifts. Despite their ambiguities, postcolonial phenomena are significant enough to warrant new language. This is not a definitive change but a decisive one, providing room to contest colonial relations of power and subordination. In my analysis I draw on postcolonialism as a critical theoretical language by which to name and resist persistent iterations of colonialism embedded in programming, policies, and research dealing with girls.

Transnationalism

Vertovec (1999) describes transnationalism as "the multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders of nation-states. These systems of ties, interactions, exchange and mobility function intensively and in real time while being spread throughout the world" (p. 148). Rigid national borders no longer determine and confine our identities, modes of knowledge production, economies, and political systems. The profound conversions of globalization have multiple, often contradictory, impacts, but their effects on the consciousness of girls and on the constitution of girlhood is

undeniable. Transnationalism is a process that holds both promise and tension; it is at once flexible, fluid, and incredibly absorptive (Hall, 1997). The powerful drive towards creating homogeneity through propagation of corporate and American imperialisms, for example, confounds new opportunities for grassroots resistance.

Vertovec (1999) identifies five significant sociocultural, economic, and political shifts that characterize transnationalism. These shifts, discussed below, carry important repercussions for minority girls.

i. Place and belonging. Among significant shifts produced by transnationalism is the emergence of identifications with home, place, and belonging that are increasingly fluid and that cut across physical space and national borders. We are moving progressively from situated or localized selves or places to hybrid translocalities and multiple identifications. This shift is mediated, in part, by the prevalence of global travel and the accessibility of Internet communications. For instance, in contrast to traditional understandings of immigration as a definitive transition from one culture and homeland to another, the girls in “It’s About Us” use the Internet to sustain overlapping affiliations to multiple national identities, in effect reconceptualizing notions of home and belonging. As recently as ten years ago, immigrants might have had to wait months for a telephone conversation or a letter from family; today, girls can be instantly updated of day-to-day developments in the lives of friends and extended family members in their or their parents’ home countries. They can inform themselves of developments in transnational politics, maintain language skills, stay in touch with local gossip and evolutions in popular culture and, as a result, retain vibrant and variegated identifications with multiple homelands and citizenships.

ii. Multilocalized and hybrid identities. In addition to new iterations of home and belonging, traditionally fixed, essentialized identity categories are being replaced by multiple, hybrid, hyphenated, and overlapping identities. For example, transgendered and

transsexual young people, children of mixed-race heritage, and those with multiple and hyphenated citizenships challenge the parameters of universalized and mutually exclusive definitions of race, sexuality, gender, and nationality in psychological, physiological, and sociocultural constructions. These fixed categories are hallmarks in psychosocial research and, as such, shape much of child and family counselling and practice. Through the course of my research and practice, I encountered numerous examples of how powerfully these determinants of identity reduce and control minority girls' identities. For instance, the girls in "It's About Us" describe how their sense of 'Canadianness' often collapsed when confronted with monolithic conceptualizations of nationhood, identity, and belonging through questions such as "What nationality are you really?"

iii. New forms of global capitalism. It is not only social and personal categories that have been troubled and expanded by transnational change. Capital production now operates through new global forms, for example, transnational corporations. These mega corporations operate across and beyond territorial and national borders and structures. Some of the girls in "It's About Us" have parents who are actively engaged in the new transnational economy, which requires them to spend several months each year living and working in their birth or other countries.

iv. Political and social engagement. Discourses of girls' civic engagement and citizenship are also being transformed by transnational political movements and alliances as these new global social economies disrupt mainstream avenues for political and social participation. New forms of transnational political and social engagement are transforming grassroots activism. For instance, women's and Indigenous organizations are forming transnational political coalitions to advocate on common issues, such as sexual trafficking of women, corporate exploitation, or environmental racism.

v. Structural changes in social formations. Transnationalism is also bringing about structural changes in social formations in both public and private spheres. New

kinds of transnational communities are shaped by transborder movement and travel. One concrete example is that of Canada's international school-exchange programs.

Educational institutions solicit international students—sometimes described as ‘satellite children’—who relocate to Canada temporarily for educational purposes, primarily English-language training. The students and their families maintain cultural, citizenship, and economic ties with other countries, even as they integrate into their adopted social, economic, and educational milieu. Organized in ‘satellite’ familial formations, international students operate within multiple sociocultural systems and across national borders, bringing a transnational consciousness to both educational and migration systems.

Implications

The five iterations of transnationalism described by Vertovec are reshaping our consciousness, identity formations, social, political, and economic structures, modes of cultural and knowledge production and communication, and, of course, the discourses and social forces that shape girlhoods as well as girls themselves. These changes raise critical implications for our work with girls living in transnational contexts. The experiences of the girls in “It’s About Us” highlight the gaps in rigid, universalized psychosocial interpretations and responses. Consider, for example, the experiences of Eliza, a young Kosovar girl who participated in our focus groups. Her father was killed in the war and she is now a refugee in Canada. She describes how her daily consciousness is mediated by international news reports and policy shifts:

It was OK for a year, but then it got worse because some children were killed. The UN went in ... now we are always watching TV... My teachers [don’t] understand. They have no idea what we go through. I couldn’t focus, I didn’t want leave my mom alone at home so I don’t go to school. Most the kids here don’t even know what the war is for, for why we come here. What is a refugee they don’t know. Here we’re not anything good. They just think I’m terrorist because I’m Muslim. (Eliza, 17)

Stories like Eliza's provide layered insights into the subjective experiences of minority girls as they are shaped by tensions between global and local structures. Eliza's multipositioned transnational consciousness intimately mediates her daily life in Canada. Her identification with Kosovar politics profoundly affects her health, her performance in school, relationships with family and friends, as well as her emotional and physical well-being. She comments that the complicated traumas she experienced during the war are erased through her racialization as a 'refugee terrorist.' Yet, despite the barriers she faces, few of the practitioners who work with her are equipped to support her healing process, her participation in a new city and school, and her efforts to negotiate her ambiguous transnational positioning.

Transnational global shifts require new knowledge about how minority girls negotiate issues of identity formation, belonging, social inclusion, and engagement within, as described by Fine (2004), an unravelling social fabric that reveals drastically unequal girlhoods. Unless practitioners, policy makers, and researchers engage language and devise approaches that better respond to the complex demands and contexts of minority girls, we put them at risk for further marginalization. And yet, as I mentioned in my introduction and explicate in the following chapter, the voices of youth- and girl-focused researchers and practitioners are conspicuously absent from emerging theoretical work on transnationalism and postcolonialism (Fine et al., 2000; Fuller, 1980; Giroux, 1993; Hart, 2002; Kaomea, 2003). These conceptual gaps have serious implications for our research and practice; this is why I call for a critical review of conceptualizations of girlhood to draw forth models that more effectively represent minority girls' realities in predominantly White local contexts, as they are increasingly fissured by transnational movement.

CHAPTER 3:

CONSTITUTING GIRLHOODS: TALKING BACK TO MASTER NARRATIVES

Master narratives, despite their pervasiveness and resilience to change, are “porous—and hence changeable, interruptible, and possibly negatable” (Harris, Carney, & Fine, 2001, p. 8).

In this chapter I trace the links between the master narratives of colonial legacies, and processes of gendered racialization in girl-centered research, policy, and practice. I offer a critical review of conceptualizations of girls in the applied field of youth work and in the emerging field of girlhood studies. I argue first that racialized minority girls are underrepresented and often problematically characterized across these fields (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Leadbeater, Ross, & Way, 1996; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001; Weaver, 1990). I also expand on my discussion of Whiteness and locality to draw links between social exclusion and minority girls’ practices of identity formation and engagement.

Peeling Back the Covers

Too often, as Blackstock (2003) argues:

there is an assumption that colonization is not a present experience; there is little knowledge of the systemic barriers that continue to block the way forward. We must unpack the values, ideologies and actions that support colonization, expose them ... promote focused civil and political action ... whilst redressing the impacts of colonization (p. 2).

To understand the gaps in youth- and girl-centered psychosocial research, we have to trace its history and make visible the links between the human sciences and colonial systems. Tracking these links is a profoundly personal project for me, and one to which I have dedicated much of my scholarly and community work. The words of Smith (1999) resonate deeply: “The critique of positivism by feminist theorists, ethnic minorities, and indigenous peoples has emerged from the experience of people who have

been studied, researched, written about, and defined by social scientists” (p. 169). Smith argues that as the monopolies of European colonial empires grew, research methodologies became powerful tools for legitimizing the abusive outcomes of colonialization:

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. The ways in which research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples (Smith, 1999, p. 1).

Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony is particularly useful to explicate the relationship between means of knowledge production and colonialism. Gramsci advanced the concept of hegemony to describe how the dominant class or social group exerts control over marginalized groups through a variety of consensus means (Loomba, 1998). These consensus means are embedded in social, political, and economic systems and institutions (for instance, the media, bureaucracies and the educational system), which serve to transmit, normalize, and ‘invisibilize’ colonial relations of ruling. Hegemonies are enacted through what Delgado-Bernal (1998) calls “master narratives,” the social narratives created to serve the interests of dominant groups and the institutions and social practices they embody. These are the stories “told by elites that remind us of their identity in relation to outgroups, and provide them with a form of shared reality in which their own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado-Bernal, 1998, p. 2). These narratives, as Harris, Carney, and Fine (2001) point out, “are often hard to see until one looks ‘under the covers’—they are normally labelled as common sense and therefore become invisible in everyday life and academic productions” (p. 8).

Uncovering master narratives requires us to peel back the covers of psychosocial research on girls to reveal the ways it monopolizes the construction of minority girlhood. In other words, if we are to unravel the colonial fabric of research, we first must find the

threads. A brief exploration is therefore needed of the way that colonialism and research have intertwined to govern the history of racialization and our epistemologies of research and knowledge production.

Racialization

The intimate relationship between colonialism and research produced one of the most significant master narratives to structure the experiences of Indigenous and minority girls, that of racialization. According to Miles (1989), racialization involves the hierarchical categorization of groups based on socially constructed cultural, physical, and social characteristics. These characteristics vary contextually and historically; they include phenotypical features like skin and hair colour, as well as nonbiological characteristics such as language, clothing, religious markers, performance and intelligence measures, and supposed or inferred 'personality' traits (Connolly, 2000; Ong & Nonini, 1997). Through the discourses, practices, and systems of master narration, dominant groups (i.e., White Euro-Westerners) are racialized as the universal normative standard, while other groups (e.g., immigrant or Indigenous girls) are racialized as Other, permanent outsiders to a normalized White center (Connolly, 2000; Kaomea, 2003; Kelly, 1998). As the dominant cultural system, Whiteness is cast as neutral, invisible (acultural), and normative. Through constructed dichotomies of dominance/subalterity, Whiteness defines the center and, by contrast, what is deviant, backwards, and unmodern (Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996; Spivak, 1996).

Theories of racialization help to track the colonial stratification of social systems, structures, and institutions, which all contain prescriptions for cultural values and beliefs, social behaviour, justice, and moral development. These prescriptions are institutionalized in the social, economic, and political structures that govern minority girls in their daily lives. Inevitably, they are also embedded in mainstream psychosocial

research and practice. These scripts are normally so embedded in our social consciousness and systems that they become 'common sense' and thus incredibly difficult to contest until one 'peels back the covers.'

Dominant Discourses of Race and Gender

In an effort to 'peel back the covers' on my own field of child and youth care, in this section I explore gaps in three dominant psychosocial theories (developmental, cross-cultural and ecological) that inform applied youth work. I then examine further gaps in theories of girlhood.

Developmental Theories

Theories of child development have directly shaped sociocultural and scientific notions of childhood, adolescence, girlhood, and, therefore, our policies and practices in relation to youth and girls. Smith (1999) argues that:

assumptions that guide research designs tend to reflect the modernist oppositional binaries and dualisms, hierarchical classification systems, essentialist, fixed, homogeneous categories, and claims about truth and knowledge that underlie and perpetuate the elevation of western values, beliefs, practices and thought over those of all "Others" (p. 56).

The fields of child psychology and youth work have been shaped by dominant Euro-Western constructions of normative development, theories that have been sustained by empirical research on White, abled, heteronormative children and families (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Carlson, 2000; Connolly, 2000; Baker, Panter-Brick, & Todd, 1996). In order to advance universal theories of development under which all Other children's experiences could be subsumed, traditionally these fields largely excluded children of colour from psychological research, policies, and models of practice (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Griffin, 2004; Shields & Behrman, 2004; Weaver, 1990). In turn, these psychological models were used to legitimize categories of race, sexuality, and gender by

measuring deviance from the established norm (Dawes, 2000; Fuller, 1980; Kaomea, 2003; Woodhead, 1993).

As for children outside these dominant groups, their identities have fallen, by default, under the banner of gender and diversity studies, ecological models, and cross-cultural psychology. But even in these areas of study which attend to diversity, important gaps exist. While these fields focus on differences, they also contribute to reproductions of essentialist representations of diversity that serve to misrepresent, or even erase, the reality of minority girls' experiences.

Cross-Cultural Studies

Cross-cultural psychologists typically rely on empirical research designs, methods, and tools to assess the impacts of culture, race, and ethnicity on children, basing their work on demographic variables, cross-sectional studies, indicators of variation, culture-bound behaviour assessments, and ethnic identity comparisons (Berry, 1993; Matsumoto, 1994; McLoyd & Steinberg, 1998; Phinney & Landin, 1998). Because identity is conceptualized as individually produced, in much of the cross-cultural research literature about adolescent girls or ethnic minority youth, identity categories such as 'gender,' 'race,' 'ethnicity,' and 'citizenship' have been constructed as innate, fixed, unidimensional, discrete, and comparable (Carlson, 2000; Goodnow, 1994; Griffin, 2004; Morawski, 2001; Weaver, 1990). These categories of 'difference' assist cross-cultural psychologists in claiming knowledge about children's cultures that is "not only descriptive but explanatory" (Cooper & Denner, 1998, p. 2). The use of cultural difference to code Whiteness as neutral and Otherness as deviant has been propagated through writing and research that reinforces norms based on the referent group. These norms are in many ways self-propagating: They reflect the predominance of Euro-Western, heterosexual men in legislative, executive, and judicial systems, as well as in academic and educational institutions where knowledge about children is produced.

Research on Aboriginal youth and youth of colour often involves cross-cultural studies which use social indicators to compare groups' relationships with normalized concepts of wellness, development, mental health, and social integration. Therapeutic and program approaches are then designed to enable more effective 'social integration' or 'social inclusion' of marginalized youth into dominant social systems, thus furthering processes of cultural assimilation. Spencer and Dornbusch (1990) found that "the focus of government funding on research and policies involving ethnic minority youth and problems of crime, drug use and pregnancy reinforce the links from ethnicity or cultural diversity to high risk status rather than to competence" (p. 11). Cross-cultural psychologists Weaver (1990) and Rasberry (1986) argue that such studies place the burden of internalizing the norms of the dominant culture on the child's and family's shoulders. In these studies, acculturative stress and experiences of discrimination and social exclusion have predominantly been characterized as indicators of psychosocial risk—a failure to adapt—rather than systemic barriers to social inclusion related to race, class, citizenship, and gender.

These kinds of culturalist explanations prevail in studies of minority and Indigenous girls, feeding into gendered discourses about their growing vulnerability. Jiwani, Janoviček, and Cameron (2001), Pratt (2002), and Ahmad (2001) all found that immigrant girls of colour are constructed as lacking an ability to negotiate multiple demands and worldviews; when they do not seamlessly integrate into their dominant host cultures, they are pathologized as victims of oppressive families. Dominant discourses of immigrant parents typically represent them as unprogressive and stubbornly clinging to outdated, rigid worldviews (Brah, 1996; Fuligni, 1998; Griffin, 2004; Short, 1998).

Lawrence (2004) and Gross (2003) also note that higher levels of school drop-out, suicide, and teen pregnancy for Indigenous girls tend to be attributed to essentialist 'cultural' explanations. Indigenous girls, like immigrant girls, are depicted as stretching

themselves as far as possible in two fundamentally opposite and incompatible directions, until they stretch so far that they finally break. The impacts of colonial histories, systemic racism, and barriers to social inclusion are obscured, while blame is placed on girls, families, and communities for failing to adequately negotiate Euro-Western norms.

Ecological Models

Ecological models of child development offer a multilayered reading of the role of context and social systems in shaping children's development. Some of the models that have stimulated the most scholarship on children's environments include the ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995), ecocultural (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Harkness et al., 1992), and integrative-ecological and cultural-ecological (Coll-Garcia, Thorne, Cooper & Scott-James, 1997; Ogbu, 1983, 1997) models. Although they approach children's development from slightly different angles, all of the models focus on mapping the interlocking individual, familial, institutional, sociocultural, political, and material systems that shape children's milieux and contexts. In his cultural-ecological model, Ogbu (1997) proposes a "theoretical alternative to universal models of child rearing and competence based on studies of European American middle-class children" which "tend[s] to explain the widespread school failure of minority children in terms either of cultural deficiencies in their family experiences or of their genetic inferiority" (p. 8). Contextualized cultural-ecological models such as Ogbu's provide a roadmap for tracking the development of a child's unique social locations, including ethnicity, class, religion, and gender, which tend to be disregarded in normative developmental models.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) notion of the "chronosystem" is a particularly useful concept for developing a historicized, chronosocial analysis of intersecting systems and their relationship to child development. The concept of chronology weaves together many of the themes around temporality, border shifts and crossings, intersectionality, and hybridity that are integral to postcolonial and transnational analysis. For example, a

chronological assessment of girls' development might illustrate how stories about girls' backgrounds and ethnicities are communicated and adapted across generations as families and communities move or are relocated across sociocultural, political, and physical borders. However, the concept of chronology is undertheorized and has not been meaningfully incorporated into other ecological models (Cooper & Denner, 1998).

Other important gaps exist in ecological theories. Ecological models fail to question *how* the systems (e.g., the family, the school, the government) that shape children's development are themselves constructed and sustained. Goodnow (1994) and Taylor and Wang (1997) are critical of prevailing ahistoricized, depoliticized applications of ecological theory. They argue, in essence, that more concerted scholarship is needed to examine how systems themselves are affected by social forces, and how social formations (e.g., colonialism or racism) that are not mediated through a primary system such as the family directly affect children's development. By analytically privileging only the *impact* of ecology and context on development, we conceal the histories that create and sustain the systems themselves.⁹ James and Prout (1997) argue that theories and applications of development would be greatly informed by a more comprehensive, intersectional analysis of how institutional policies and structures construct discourses of youth and girlhood and, thus, youth and girls themselves.

Girlhood and Girl Studies

The field of girlhood and girl studies arose from a need to theorize the experiences of girls in response to male-centered, gender-neutral models of youth development (Carlson, 2000; Hey, 1997; Kapur, 1993; Ward & Benjamin, 2004). The highly contested and rapidly growing terrain of girl studies has undergone dramatic theoretical and conceptual shifts in the last thirty years.

⁹ In the next chapter, I demonstrate how postcolonial and transnational feminisms provide useful conceptual tools to highlight these crucial distinctions.

At the beginning of the 20th century, psychosocial conceptualizations of girlhood were largely based on universalizing scientific and psychological perspectives. Girlhood was understood as a physical and emotional transition from childhood into adulthood, experienced by all young women in similar ways based on White, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied norms (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005). In the mid 1970s, feminist researchers began to reconceptualize girls as visible and central to youth studies. Feminist scholars who wanted to understand girls on their own terms developed girl-centered theories and practices and introduced a structural analysis of gender and patriarchy into youth studies (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004; Ward & Benjamin, 2004). Their focus on the sociocultural, historical, and political dimensions of youth, gender, and femininity helps to illuminate the circumstances, opportunities, and challenges of girlhood.

Although girl studies scholars were instrumental in challenging boy-focused discourses in psychosocial research, important gaps remained. Griffin (2004) disputes the assumption that girls' lives have been made visible in equal ways by girl-centered studies: "If girls and young women have been and remain relatively invisible in most youth research, then some girls have been more invisible than others" (p. 30). Girls of colour have suffered multiple erasures, not only in youth research but within feminism itself. In the 1980s, researchers of colour argued that the lives of girls and young women of colour within and outside Euro-Western contexts did not necessarily fit Western feminist perspectives on girlhood. They criticized Anglocentric approaches to much youth research, including those within the growing field of girl studies (Amos & Parmar, 1981; Bertram, Marusza, Fine, & Weis, 2000). Especially problematic is the conflation by some feminists of all women's and girls' experiences into a universal notion of sisterhood, which Michelle di Leonardo (1991, cited in Weis & Fine, 2005) describes as

“that feminist metonymic fallacy” (p. 147) that portrays White middle-class women’s experience as representative of all women’s and girls’ histories.

As in psychosocial youth studies, the attempt by some feminists to capture the Other results in them collapsing various ‘cultural’ explanations into an essentialized caricature. Girls of colour are often constructed as victims of their own culture. Dimensions of race and gender are constructed as cultural phenomena that are fixed across time and space and locatable geographically and socially. This is particularly true of the emerging fascination, particularly among feminists, with discourses of difference, hybridity, and multiple subjectivities. In her landmark essay on the politics of difference, Narayan (1997) elaborates:

Phenomena that seem ‘different,’ ‘alien’ or ‘other’ seem to cross our borders with considerably more frequency than problems that seem ‘similar’ to those that affect mainstream Western women. It is not difficult to conclude that there is a premium on ‘Third-World difference’ that results in greater interest being accorded to those issues that seem strikingly ‘different’ from those affecting mainstream Western women. This over-simplification constructs ‘things that happen elsewhere’ as different from ‘things that happen here’ (p. 196).

Minority girls are constructed as somehow more contradictory or problematic than Euro-Western girls, even if they have been born and raised in the West (Griffin, 2004). Griffin reflects that, in much of mainstream girl studies literature, ‘modern’ girlhood is “located in the First World, associated with Anglo, Western cultures, seen as civilized and progressive for women, while ‘traditional’ girlhood is associated with Third World contexts, and with girls and women of colour, and is seen as anti-feminist and restrictive for women” (p. 32). Here the privileging of difference and the focus on diversity among girls becomes a semantic mantra that obscures and relativizes real social inequities (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Mohanty, 2003). Experiences of marginalization among girls of colour are reported as cultural, generational, and adaptive conflicts rather than as symptoms of deeply embedded colonial relations of ruling. Griffin argues that

it is important to avoid adopting an Anglocentric perspective on the constitution of girlhood and the lives of girls and young women in contemporary societies, and also to acknowledge the diversity of girls' lives ... and the difficulties involved in living with, against, and through these contradictions (Griffin, 2004, p. 29).

Feminist scholars such as Bertram, Marusza, Fine, and Weis (2000), Brah (1996), Griffin (2004), and Lee (2004b, 2006) emphasize that research about racialized girls should involve a more critical analysis of the intersections of age, race, gender, and class in the context of identity construction, representation, and resistance. They advocate a feminism that more fully theorizes the shifting nature of intersectionalities in producing multiple girlhoods rather than one universal girlhood.

Competing Concepts of Girlhood and Girls' Agency

To understand minority girls' practices of identity formation, engagement, and resistance in predominantly White contexts, it is useful to review debates about girls' agency. Girls' agency has been represented in significantly different ways across discourses of girlhood and feminism, with girls depicted alternately as voiceless victims of patriarchal culture, as aggressive and explicitly sexualized, as feminist counterculture agents, and as feisty, empowered pop culture icons. These competing conceptualizations of girl's agency position girls at the center of popular culture and provide powerful scripts for public and academic discourses—and hence policy and program development—in relation to girls' engagement.

Girl power

The first predominant discourse, Girl Power, is fissured by competing interpretations—the anti-establishment, explicitly politicized 'riot grrrls' and the mainstream, marketable 'power girl' (Aapola et al., 2005; Hernández & Rehman, 2002). Riot grrrls emerged from the punk rock scene in a movement involving mainly White,

middle-class young women, many identifying as queer, who espoused a liberatory sociopolitical stance. Also rooted in the riot grrrl movement is an emerging anti-colonial, anti-racist, transnational feminism taken up by young women of colour that informs my analysis, and to which this research contributes.¹⁰

As the riot grrrl movement grew in visibility, its message became commodified into a new depoliticized iteration of girl power, the now-ubiquitous cute, feisty, sexy, ‘power girl’ icon. Constructing girls as empowered agents and significant cultural and economic producers and consumers, the commercialization of the ‘Can do’ and ‘You go, girl!’ brand of girl power has catapulted marketing campaigns targeting the rapidly growing teen and ‘tween’ girl markets.

Girl Power has had the positive effect of popularizing feminist concerns for girls’ voice, empowerment, and liberation, enhancing access by community-based organizations to girl-focused research and programming funding. However, important gaps remain: Mikel-Brown (2005) stresses that monolithic, colour- and class-blind representations of girlhood have engendered a “relentless overpsychologising of girls that has served to render invisible the social and material conditions of girls’ lives” (p. 147). Some feminists express concern that the construction of a neoliberal, self-inventing subject serves to maintain rather than undermine gender, race, and class hierarchies: “Girl power’s popularity is credited to its very lack of threat to the status quo for the ways in which it reflects the ideologies of white middle-class, individualism and personal responsibility over collective responses to social problems” (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 30).

¹⁰ See, for example, *Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism* (Hernández & Rehman, 2002); *Yello-Oh Girls! Emerging Voices Explore Culture, Identity* (Nam, 2001), *Growing Up Asian American* (Hong, 1993); *Girlhood: Redefining the Limits* (Jiwani, Steenberg, & Mitchell, 2006) and *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity* (Harris, 2004a).

Vulnerable girlhood

The second significant account of girlhood is the vulnerable 'girl in crisis,' which is split into three competing discourses of vulnerability—the 'voiceless girl,' the 'mean girl,' and the 'party girl.' These representations of girls' agency support the psychological imperative that, in order to effect change in their lives, girls at risk require expert outside intervention to be empowered and transformed into agents with voice and with healthy social relations.

The voiceless girl discourse was most famously articulated in Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (1994). Pipher argued that girls experience a process of self splitting and losing voice as they enter adolescence, a consequence of the challenges inherent in a girl-hostile modern patriarchal society that denies them expression of their authentic selves. This discourse importantly focused attention away from psychological explanations and onto the sociocultural pressures placed on girls, naming the role of patriarchy, sexism, and capitalism in producing girls' vulnerabilities. But here again, the voiceless girl argument assumes that patriarchy impacts all girls equally, disregarding the intersecting effects of race, religion, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability in shaping girls' vulnerability:

The omission of racism as a debilitating social ingredient in girls' lives is curious, particularly in the US context, where race continues to be the single most important factor in determining the life chances of young people. The suggestion seems to be that either white girls are vulnerable to cultural influences in a way that young women of colour are not, or that the lives of young white women are assumed to represent all of American girlhood (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 45).

Following on the footsteps of the voiceless girl, the 'mean girl' and 'party girl' appear as new manifestations of the crisis discourse of girlhood (Harris, 2004b; Jiwani, Steenbergen, & Mitchel, 2006). The 'party girl' is the latest iteration of a growing glamorization of seemingly empowered, highly sexualized, economically privileged girl consumers. Young Hollywood celebrities like Lindsey Lohan, Paris Hilton, and Britney

Spears exemplify a lifestyle replete with explicitly sexualized behaviour, publicized substance use, late night clubbing and expensive clothing and cars. These girls strategically use a mixture of performed innocence and sexualized empowerment to engage in high-risk behaviour, pushing the limits of what has traditionally been the domain of boys. But despite her popularity and perceived emancipation, the party girl is vulnerable to violence and abuse and thus remains in crisis, requiring adult intervention such as disordered eating and substance use programs to bring her back onto a path for successful development.

Finally, an emerging preoccupation with the image of some girls' highly territorial and often aggressive social manipulations is also eclipsing the image of the victimized, voiceless girl. As a result, girls' perceived social, physical, and sexual aggression has become a focus of concern and surveillance, resulting in the increasing criminalization of girls' offenses which have traditionally been ignored (Artz, 1998; Artz & Hoskins, 2005; Harris, 2004b). But here again, the mean girl image remains steeped in race and class stereotypes; as Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) argue, it is those young women "who lack the resources to stay out of view of the criminal justice system who are targeted and criminalized, resulting in spiraling arrest rates for girls of colour" (p. 50).

The conflation of differences amongst girls further erases and marginalizes girls who are socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged. As Harris points out, the discourse of the vulnerable girl assumes that an upper middle-class, White, heterosexual, full citizen girl, despite the privilege afforded her, is as vulnerable as one who is socially marginalized (Harris, 2001a, 2004b). In turn, the Girl Power assumption that determination, drive, and style are enough to achieve success, social belonging, and emancipation presumes that girls are free to create themselves outside of the constraints of gender, race, class, political, and social disparities (Harris, 2004b).

Theorizing Whiteness, Locality, and Social Exclusion

Whiteness and Locality

The contradictions presented by dominant, normative discourses of girlhood bring to light a key theme of my study, touched on in Chapter 1—the need to theorize Whiteness and locality and their relationships to minority girls' social exclusion. Here I am interested in examining how a predominantly Euro-Western social context like Victoria shapes the construction of minority girls as Othered subjects differently than, for example, larger, more multicultural Canadian cities. Research about Canadian immigrant and visible minority girls is typically conducted in metropolitan centers such as Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, which have large ethnocultural populations. These studies then form the basis for discourses about nationhood, citizenship, and cultural identity. But the research findings and policies that flow from such research cannot necessarily be generalized to smaller, less diverse geographical contexts such as Victoria, where girls are surrounded by dominant Whiteness (Lee, 2004b, 2005; Lee & Lutz, 2005). Metropolitan concerns about the provision of ethno-specific settlement services and the cloistering and social exclusion of ethnocultural communities reveal little about the needs of girls who have access to few resources that would enable them to form positive readings of their transnational identities. Specifically, the cluster of research on ethnic identity development in schools with more multicultural student bodies results in inappropriate policy and service responses to service provision. These differences in context must be critically examined. Throughout my analysis, I consider questions such as: What does growing up in a dominant cultural context of Whiteness mean for minority girls' sense of self and belonging? How does social exclusion shape minority girls' practices and discourses of engagement, and what does this mean for research and practice?

Victoria's relative homogeneity poses paradoxical challenges for girls of colour. While it is 'globalized' economically, technologically, and by virtue of its positioning in diverse North American society, Victoria, like other small Canadian towns, betrays a pervasive colonial consciousness. In one of its popular weekly newsmagazines, a reporter argues that in as much as Victoria is beautiful:

it is also cursed by small-mindedness and bigotry, a beautiful little village of people living in the past.... Its history is not just tea houses, Union Jacks, ladies-in-waiting and British parliamentary tradition.... These aren't just isolated incidents or one-off comments, revealing time and time the deep and thriving undercurrent of racial prejudice in Victoria (Francis, 2004).

As the examples in this chapter demonstrate, for girls with transnational consciousness who live in predominantly White contexts, Whiteness becomes the dominant social formation through which racialization is animated, controlled, and policed. In this context, Whiteness is much more complex and pervasive than a racial identity based on appearance or skin colour. Rather, it is a socially endemic cultural system that is ideologically, materially, and historically based and reproduced through dominant formations such as political systems, the media, social policy and services, and educational institutions (Minh-ha, 1989, 1997).

Pack-Brown (1999) defines racial identity as "racial awareness, sometimes referred to as racial consciousness. That is, a person who is racially aware has an understanding that her or his racial group membership can and often does influence her or his psychological, emotional and physical development" (p. 83). This conceptualization of ethnic identity presumes that minority girls possess extensive knowledge of both their own and dominant ethnicities and that they have access to spaces, role models, and systems where these identities may be communicated and reproduced. At first glance, the identity construction of racialized minority girls in more homogenous localities appears less problematic than for girls in large cities. Immersed in Whiteness, these girls learn

English quickly, have diverse groups of friends, and seem to ‘fit in.’ This surface reading, however, yields little information about the high cost of fitting in or about the complicated choices girls make to accommodate the impositions of living Otherness in a context where Otherness is neither spoken of nor tolerated. Their experiences of engagement and empowerment are constrained within a context that limits who they can and cannot be. Frankenberg (1997) reminds us that the “challenge has remained of how to, in Audre Lorde’s terms, ‘dismantle the master’s house’ while, not only do we live in it, but *it* by some architectural trick, lives in *us*” (p. 56).

A further gap arising from the pervasively normative effects of Whiteness is articulated by Winddance-Twine (1996), who compared the experiences of Black girls in New York with those in the segregationist South. In New York, where multiculturalism is touted as advanced, the girls chose White dolls over Black ones as being the more attractive; in the South, where Black aesthetic values tend to be reinforced as an ironic by-product of segregation, girls chose the Black dolls as the prettiest. According to Winddance-Twine, successful ‘integration’ for the girls in New York meant internalizing dominant White norms as they relate to ‘acceptable’ measures of femininity, beauty, belonging, and success. This example emphasizes how discourses of multiculturalism and diversity, assumed to be inherently positive, serve in effect to erase and silence difference.

A growing body of research investigating the experiences of racial minority youth and girls who grow up in predominantly White communities¹¹ brings to light common patterns. The context of White predominance reveals a lack of opportunities for minority girls to develop their own counter narratives or resistance and to explore their complex identities as transnational subjects. Girls who are submerged in mainstream culture do not

¹¹ See, for example, Bettis & Adams (2005); Carrington & Short (1993); Connolly (2000); Fine, Stewart, & Zucker (2000); Gilborn (1996); Handa (2003); Jiwani, et al., 2006; Kakembo (1994); Kaomea (2003); Kelly (1998); Lewis (2001); MacPhee, n.d.; Mikel-Brown (2005); Poteet (2001); Varma-Joshi, Baker, & Tanaka (2004).

need supports to promote integration; they need mechanisms to challenge the erasure of their identities and the resources by which to craft an oppositional consciousness. Taisha reflects on her struggles to find adequate supports to normalize her experiences as an Ethiopian-Canadian living in Victoria:

Well, I just feel like I never get to talk about it, like we don't even exist in their eyes. You talk to the school counsellors and they don't know your culture, they don't even know what racism is, and they're ... totally not able to help you. They just don't get it. (Taisha, 16)

As Taisha explains, girls who live in predominantly White communities must negotiate both the assertion of dominant Whiteness within those sites and the community's denial of both its actual and potential complexities. Girls like Taisha must also negotiate belonging only by cutting through restrictive discourses of what is normal and acceptable in terms of their bodies, relationships, sexualities, identities, and sociocultural, economic, and political roles.

According to Connolly (2000), Jiwani et al. (2001), and Winddance-Twine (1996), the absence of social congruence and institutional representation in girls' multiple worlds both silences and creates dissonance. Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983) describe the cost of these erasures: "When one's life experience is continually erased by silence, the significance of such a forum cannot be underestimated, [for] silence is like starvation. Don't be fooled. It's nothing short of that" (p. 29).

Social Exclusion

Debates about social inclusion and exclusion are an increasingly prevalent focus of social policy and research and a predominant theme of this dissertation. One sharpening focus within social inclusion debates is how girls develop and integrate socially relevant skills and behaviours that promote resilience and social inclusion.

The Search Institute (2003, 2004) has developed a 'developmental assets' framework which argues that a young person develops constructive assets when they

participate in meaningful ways in community, demonstrate healthy boundaries and expectations, develop and utilize social competencies, and have supportive social systems. Similarly, discourses of sociocultural capital describe the social and cultural commodities that are valued in a particular society (Garbarino, 1992; Tonkin, 2002). Sociocultural capital grants girls access to institutional and social networks, provides them with 'insider' knowledge of dominant ways of knowing, and enhances their ability to participate fully in civic life (Tonkin, 2002; Yee, 2003). Community fabric is a powerful factor in nurturing girls' engagement and social capital. Communities with responsive parenting programs, school curricula, and other supports have healthier children who engage in fewer risky behaviours (Tonkin, 2002; Tonkin & Foster, 2005). Similarly, social contexts that promote social inclusion, community building, advocacy, and self-governance have better outcomes in terms of youth engagement (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). The development of sociocultural capital is cumulative and dialogical; the more capital girls have, the more they can build.

However, as with constructions of youth and girlhood, dominant discourses of youth engagement and participation often hide the uneven impacts of social systems on shaping minority girls' engagement and participation in their communities. Girls who are excluded from dominant social systems have fewer opportunities to build relevant assets and sociocultural capital, and are therefore prevented from participating in realms of influence and decision making. For example, as Lee (2004a, 2004b) demonstrates in her research on service provision, Victoria's predominantly White context creates barriers to the full engagement of girls of colour and limits opportunities for them to build social capital within mainstream settings. The services, institutional practices, curricula, and recreational spaces available to them do not reflect various cultural perspectives and realities and often promote colour- and gender-blind service delivery models.

Research on social exclusion reiterates the critical roles that place, locality, and context play in shaping girls' lived realities, particularly in dominant White spaces, and advocates a need to provide access to social systems that normalize and reflect girls' experiences. Characteristics of social exclusion include residence in substandard housing; unequal access to employment, social, and health services; stigmatization; spatial and social isolation; disconnection from civil society; and everyday experiences of discrimination, racism, sexism, and violence (Bolaria & Bolaria, 2002; Galabuzi, 2004). These barriers have powerful effects on minority girls. Typically, they are mutually reinforcing; as a consequence, they intensify gendered and racial concentrations of poverty (Galabuzi, 2004; Kaspar & Noh, 2001). For instance, racialized neighbourhoods often deal with social deficits and disintegrating institutions, which results in reduced access to counselling services, life skills training, child care, recreational activities, and health care services (Galabuzi, 2004).

This systemic exclusion has real, consequential effects on girls' physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development, as confirmed by Lee (2004a):

Several participants disclosed troubling physical, emotional and mental health issues and reported that they had not sought help for their problems. Many participants reported that while school counselors, teachers, community workers and other adults, including parents, were caring, supportive and understanding, very few fully grasped the complexities of their lives (pp. 1-2).

These findings are supported by other research on the impact of racism on youth and girls. The internalization of ascribed, devalued social status and jeopardized self-image (feelings of inferiority, self-hatred, shame, anger, etc.) interfere with positive identity formation and negatively impact well-being, social relationships and networks, as well as academic and professional goals and achievement (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990, in Kaspar & Noh, 2001). Suarez-Orozco (2001) found that Canadian-born girls of colour have poorer health outcomes, higher rates of obesity, higher rates of sexual

activity, and engage more frequently in violent or delinquent acts. As well, immigrant women and girls of visible minority status are more vulnerable to discrimination, marginalization, emotional disorders, and violence (Fernando, 1986, cited in Kaspar & Noh, 2001; Galabuzi, 2004). According to Varcoe (2002), women and girls of colour who experienced violence were subjected to increased scrutiny and were even denied services as health care providers commonly attribute incidences of violence against racialized women and girls to their race rather than to the vulnerabilities created by racism and sexism.

These findings raise pivotal questions for researchers and practitioners working to unsettle pernicious legacies of colonialism in their work with girls. Ormond (2004) suggests that girls' voices must be "continually situated within their daily experiences of oppressive institutional and social silencing" (p. 249). To this end, minority girls' locational particularities must be taken into account when developing strategies for supporting TE.

Conclusion

Clearly not all girls and youth are equally represented or complexified in discourses, practices, and policies related to girls' development, identity formation, and social inclusion. Three important gaps across the literature are of concern. First, dominant psychosocial conceptualizations of gender, race, sexuality, and age as fixed, innate, and comparable units of analysis reveal little about their intersectional effects in girls' lives and construct girls of colour as Others in relation to a dominant norm. Second, the representation in girlhood studies of girls as a homogenous group erases the complexities of their realities and the uneven impacts of social forces on their experiences of social inclusion and engagement. Third, by reproducing dominant discourses of girls of colour only as problematic and at risk, these literatures ultimately conceal the structural and

material barriers that limit the engagement of girls as full cultural citizens and civic participants in their communities.

These erasures are disturbing. How minority girls understand their roles as civic participants depends to a large extent on available, prevailing, and sanctioned representations of race, gender, and agency. As a result, these girls' concerns in relation to cultural shifts, relations of power, neocolonialism, and transnational identity formation, remain hidden from research, practice, and policy debates.

This is where the lack of relevant and adequate conceptual language and applied tools for dealing with the intersecting effects of gender, age, race, sexuality, and class becomes glaringly apparent. Because studies dealing with gender and race typically advocate the status quo, they propose approaches and methodologies that revolve around risk reduction and sociocultural and economic integration, rather than social justice and institutional change (Barbarin, 1998; McLoyd & Steinberg, 1998; Triandis, 1996). And, by obscuring historical and systemic inequalities, such studies serve only to reproduce colonial and patriarchal systems of service delivery and research.

By negating history, particularly the history that engendered the 'at risk' reality, many liberals are able to safely display their presumed benevolence toward a particular subordinate cultural group that they have labeled 'at risk' without having to accept that, because of their privileged position they are part of the social order that created the very reality of the oppression they want to study (Freire, 1996, p. 59).

The human and social services sectors sustain a system by which researchers study the impact of their own dominant group's colonialism on colonized communities and then develop an entire industry of programs and policies designed to help colonized populations cope with these circumstances. Meanwhile, the impact of institutional and policy gaps, such as the lack of school and human services support for minority and Indigenous girls, is obscured, and institutional policies and structures that promote specific, narrow types of citizenship are left unexamined.

What girls would benefit from are explicitly politicized and historicized theoretical models that acknowledge the socially constituting effects of psychosocial categories on their identities and on practices of research, policy development, and service provision. Accordingly, as Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) exhort, a new phase of girl studies is urgently needed—one to which this study contributes a transdisciplinary framework that contends with dilemmas facing girls of colour in an increasingly complex global context.

CHAPTER 4:
REIMAGINING MINORITY GIRLHOOD: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
FOR TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

As responsible postcolonial social scientists, we must address the colonial attitudes of our discipline, which has transformed healing practices into processes for treatment and disease prevention. As we move into the next millennium, we must not be tolerant of the neocolonialism that runs unchecked in our knowledge-generating systems. Postcolonial Indigenous thinkers should be placed in positions to act as gatekeepers of knowledge (Duran & Duran, 2002, p. 89).

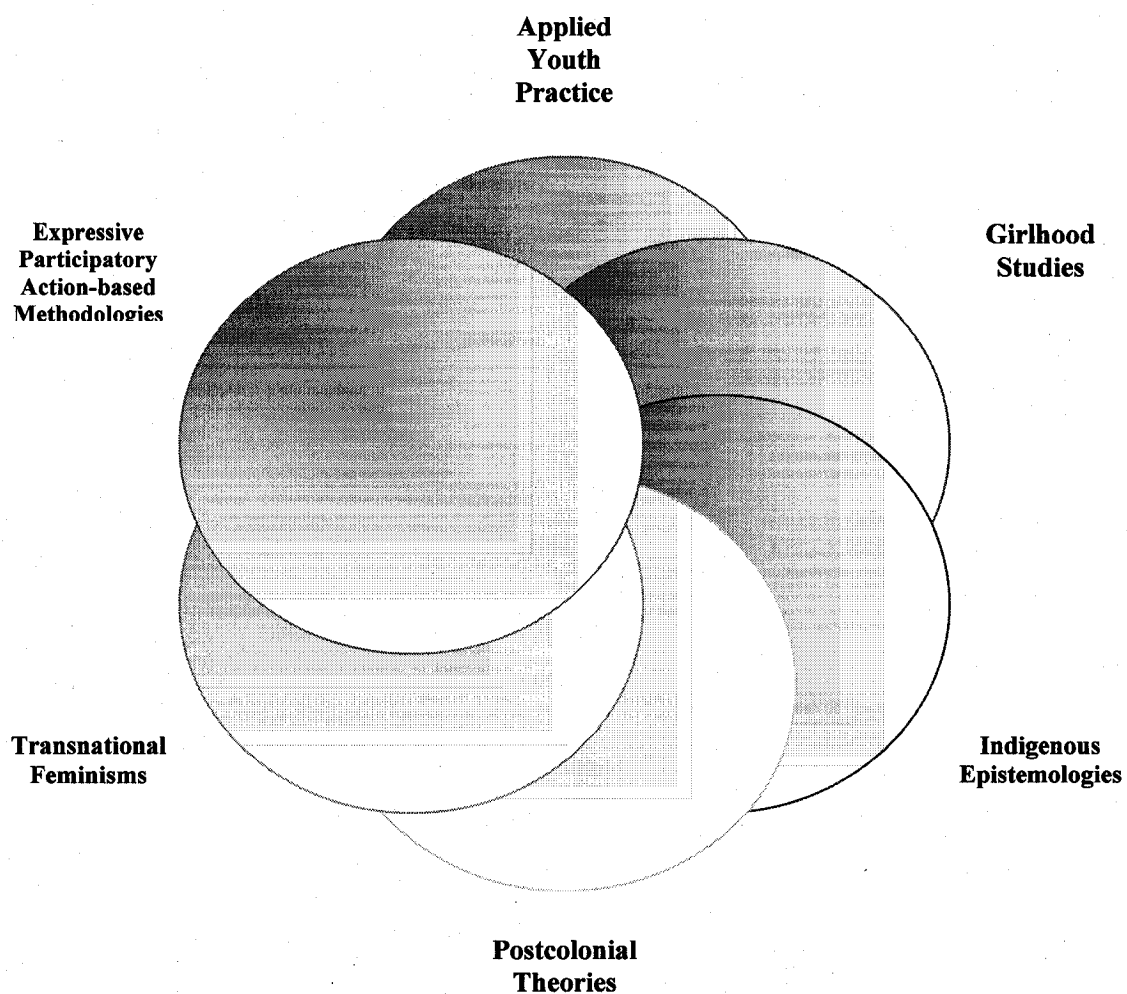
Counter-Storytelling as a Praxis of Resistance

Counter-storytelling lies at the crux of my efforts to more fully attend to identities that are peripheral to the White, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual ‘norm.’ How, though, do we rewrite narratives of girlhood? How do we take advantage of the spaces opened up by postcolonialism when colonial myths still pervade our institutional policies, research practices, and discourses of gender, race, and girlhood? How might we utilize emerging counter narratives to construct a praxis of resistance? Walkerdine (1988) calls for a strategy that “recognizes and examines the effects of normative models, whilst producing the possibility of other accounts and other sites of identification” (p. 238).

To illuminate these nuances, a praxis of resistance requires a conceptual nexus. Figure 4.1 represents my proposed transdisciplinary, transtheoretical framework. It foregrounds the theoretical underpinnings garnered from PAR, PT, applied practice, girlhood studies, and postcolonial, Indigenous, and transnational feminist theories that frame my data interpretation. From within this nexus, my analysis of TE teases out relationships among the praxes of transformation and engagement, minority girls’ social locations, methodologies employed to facilitate TE, and broader social forces that structure these dynamics. In this chapter, building on my discussion in Chapter 2 of postcolonialism and transnationalism as historical processes, I draw specifically on

postcolonial, Indigenous, and transnational feminist theories to provide a more deeply nuanced representation of racialized minority girls.¹²

Figure 4.1 A transtheoretical/transdisciplinary conceptual framework.



¹² I am indebted to Dr. Jo-Anne Lee for her guidance in the development of this conceptual framework.

Reconceptualizing Minority Girlhoods

A transtheoretical, transdisciplinary conceptual framework offers a counterpoint to problematic dominant discourses about minority girls. My conceptual framework surveys the “confluence of the various dimensions that shape and define contemporary girlhoods, especially as they are constrained by prevailing social forces and articulated by girls themselves” (Jiwani et al., 2006, p. xii). In my analysis of TE, I approach ‘minority girls’ as a much more complex category of inquiry and social action than simply Others to Whiteness. The construction of a monolithic ‘racialized minority’ girl that conflates intersections of race, age, gender, class, sexuality, ability, religion, language, and citizenship is in itself a process of epistemic recolonization. In Chapter 3, I advocated, as many do, for a reconceptualization of girls’ engagement that accounts for (1) the dialogical relationships between individual subjectivities, histories, locations, and contexts and (2) the impact of different historical trajectories in producing multiple and uneven experiences of gendered racialization. Toward this goal, I extend the ideas expressed in Lee and De Finney (2005) and frame my reconceptualization of minority girlhoods with the following starting assumptions:

1. The identities of racialized minority girls are shaped by their unique cultural locations, meaning the particular intersections in their lives of race, ethnicity, class, gender, citizenship, religion, sexuality, language, geographic location, relationship to colonialism, and so on. These complicated identities are not natural, complete, or fixed; rather, they are constantly reshaped and renegotiated in relation to sociocultural, economic, and political contexts.
2. Place and locality play significant roles in mediating identity formation and girls’ practices of engagement. In a dominant White context, the ability of racialized girls to speak about their lived realities and engage ‘on their own terms’ is often

subsumed under discourses of social belonging and engagement that fail to fully explicate their intersectionalities of identity.

3. The unique knowledges of girls who grow up under dominant Whiteness and the interlocking barriers to their engagement and social inclusion must be critically and sensitively explicated to texture otherwise flat representations of minority girlhoods.
4. Because racialized minority girls are under- and misrepresented across several fields of study, a transdisciplinary analytical framework is necessary for a more differentiated conceptualization of girls' identities and practices of engagement.

Such a framework requires that girls' voices be infused into the theoretical, policy, and practice landscape of girlhood.

A Transdisciplinary Conceptual Framework on Racialized Girlhoods

In this chapter, I chart theories of Indigeneity, hybridity, postcolonialism, and transnational feminism. I speak to these particular theories because their contributions are attuned to overarching concepts and propagations of social justice, resistance, and decolonization. Given a conceptual landscape in which the epistemic stakes are so high, the difficulty of working within any one discipline is that each is burdened with limitations and erasures. Postcolonial, transnational feminist, and Indigenous theorists grapple with related concerns and share some theoretical pathways, but they are not inherently allied or connected. Each arises from specific conceptual niches and distinct historical, cultural, and political struggles, unearths a plethora of readings of dimensions of gender, race, identity, colonialism, nationhood, citizenship, and globalization, and offers its own agenda for moving forward. It is not my goal to thoroughly investigate each theory's diverse histories, articulations, and mutual criticisms. At the risk of

collapsing these debates, I look for fruitful openings to draw strategically on what is most useful in speaking to the issues facing racialized girls and women.

Indigenous Postcolonial Epistemologies

As I touched on in Chapter 2, postcolonialism is a contested and fragmented concept¹³ with a growing array of theoretical concerns and practical applications. Postcolonial thought comprises an open-ended set of theories located predominantly in the fields of economics, humanities, the arts, and the social sciences; these theories share a goal of seeking to understand the ongoing effects, transitions out of, and resistances to colonial formations. It is precisely toward such an end that I harness their contributions. My conceptualization of TE illuminates creative forms of resistance that girls and women living under the legacy of colonial ideologies might deploy to texture and reweave the colonial fabric.

Increasing numbers of Indigenous academics and researchers are addressing social issues within a postcolonial framework of self-determination, decolonization, and social justice (Smith, 1999). Indigenous postcolonial scholars like Smith (1999) and Duran and Duran (2002) object to depictions of the colonized as passive recipients of power or hollow ‘mimics’ of European imperialism; they argue multiple forms of resistance accompany all deployments of power. A postcolonial approach complicates the rigid colonizer/colonized binary and demonstrates that these categories shift and are thus mutable, particularly by the new hybrid gatekeepers, shape shifters, ‘trickster’¹⁴ Indigenous academics who infuse their academic work with a politicality that destabilizes

¹³ Most of the theorists closely associated with the term, such as Said, Spivak, Gayatri, Hall and Bhabha, are diasporic intellectuals, with no congruent or common subjectivity, and no definitive territorial or epistemological root or niche. See Bhabha, 1990; Frankenberg & Mani, 1996; Hall 1990, 1997; Loomba, 1998; Mishra & Hodge, 1994; Shohat & Stam, 1996; Spivak, 1996.

¹⁴ Many Indigenous epistemologies include a Trickster figure, a cunning and stealthy shape shifter who plays with assumptions and employs trickery to break social codes of behaviour as a means of teaching valuable lessons.

institutional borders. p. 4). As a transformational practice, Smith exhorts, postcolonialism frames community concerns with cultural healing, resistance, and decolonization:

Indigenous thinkers use the term ‘postcolonial’ to describe a symbolic strategy for shaping a desirable future, not an existing reality. The term is an aspirational practice, goal, or idea that [we] use to imagine a new form of society that [we] desire to create, yet we recognize that post-colonial societies do not exist. Rather, we acknowledge the colonial mentality and structures that still exist in all societies and nations and the neocolonial tendencies that resist decolonization in the contemporary world (p. xix).

My conceptualization of TE aligns with this endeavour. My stance and personal commitment to enacting postcolonialism manifests in three ways: it is embodied in my consciousness and is a shared lived reality with the girls and women in this project; it serves as an analytical strategy to disrupt colonial archaeologies in knowledge, inquiry, and practice; and, most importantly, it enables me to animate concerns and stories that exist outside of and beyond colonial effects and legacies.

Postcolonial Hybridities

The girls in “It’s About Us” experience postcolonialism, transnationalism, and global change in unpredictable and discongruent ways. A critical question in postcolonial theory is how to understand these complicated, paradoxical, yet obviously asymmetrical legacies of the colonial encounter. A useful explanatory concept is ‘hybridity,’ a term most often associated with postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1990). Hybridity describes processes of “crossing over, outside and within, creating new formations out of old ones, blending, fusing, mixing, and intersecting” (Friedman, 1998, p. 92). Like transnationalism, theories of hybridity are concerned with borders and their crossings, intersections, overlappings, and transgressions. According to Friedman (1998), hybridity describes “three distinct but not mutually exclusive types of cultural mixing: fusion of differences, intermingling of differences, and mixing of the already always syncretic” (p. 84). Notions of hybridity, movement, and intersectionality resist problematic dichotomous binaries such as male/female, White/Other, normal/abnormal,

citizen/foreigner, and powerful/powerless that keep subaltern subjects locked in positions deferential to normative Whiteness. Hall (1997) argues that hybridity is paradoxically routine and transgressive; we are all already syncretic, commonplace, and transcultural, yet changing historical contexts continuously demand new kinds of boundary crossings, counter-essentialisms, and interruptive practices. For example, girls of colour living in Victoria, many of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants, hold several hybrid and contradictory subject positionings depending on this social location. They may identify with competing, overlapping, or hyphenated citizenships, ethnicities and diasporas; they may be loyal to multiple homelands, places of belonging and memories of cultural identity; they may belong to several communities, kinship and peer groups, and so on.

Postcolonial theories of hybridity are particularly relevant to dispute cultural purisms, universalisms and fundamentalisms, proposing instead that identity is malleable and contingent, a discursive performance constituted through and under relations of ruling (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Hernandez & Rehman, 2002). This is a significant conceptual move away from a concern with categorizing, predicting, and pathologizing individual psychological processes. The contention that all girls negotiate multiple and intersecting identities illustrates the connection between their local, everyday lives and global forces. Hybrid formations are increasingly tangible and consequential in minority girls' lives. A representation of identity as both socially constituted and socially constituting more fully accounts for the complicated social contexts within which girls must make meaning of their locations and their struggle for belonging.

Transnational Feminisms

The everyday conditions under which hybrid subjects experience postcolonial formations have been explicated by transnational feminists. Despite its well-documented

semantic, theoretical, and historical pathways, the transnational feminist landscape remains pluralistic. Transnational feminists¹⁵ are concerned with naming and unmaking diverse forms of patriarchy in the context of emergent global capitalism and transnational cultural production. Grewal and Kaplan (1994) and Mohanty (2003) argue that gender relations cannot be seen as universal; they are mutable, produced, repetitively circulated, and finally legitimated through movement within and across geographic, political, economic, and sociocultural borders (Loomba, 1997; Narayan & Harding, 2000; Ong, 1999). Transnational feminists disrupt the 'intellectual quietisms' of psychosocial research by questioning fixed categories of citizenship, gender, race, and social belonging. They focus instead on the scattered and multidirectional flows of hegemonies through which transnational subjects are constituted and positioned¹⁶ (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). Their reconceptualization frames identity as relational, always emerging, and grounded in historically produced relations (Anzaldúa, 2002; Bannerji, 2000; Spivak, 1996).

Transnational subjects enact and live across what Grewal and Kaplan (1994) call "scattered hegemonies," meaning multiple, diffused, and mobile forms of domination, including multiple patriarchies, nationalisms, and racialized, gendered, and class locations, to name the most prolific. Girls and their families live across and carry these contemporary social, political, and economic patriarchal forms with them as they move from one location to another (Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996; Lee, personal communication, March 6, 2007). This movement requires us to understand the ways that girls are

¹⁵ See Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Bannerji, 2000; Brah, 1996; Grewal, 1999; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Hernandez & Rehman, 2002; Minh-ha, 1997, 1989; Mohanty, 2003; Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Narayan & Harding, 2000; Ong, 1999; Ong & Nonini, 1997; Westwood & Phizacklea, 2000.

¹⁶ Transnational diasporic subjects travel, live, or identify within and across different nation states and/or cultural or civic citizenships. Transnational subjects do not all become transnational in the same way or with the same implications (e.g., some are deterritorialized by choice, for economic or educational gain; others are forced into migration by war, natural disasters, or labour and sexual exploitation).

constituted as objects and subjects within and among multiple patriarchies in their ethnocultural communities, dominant groups, and state discourses and practices. On a daily basis, through interactions with families, peers, schools, and neighbourhoods, girls confront contradictory expectations about their social roles, sexuality, measures of beauty and 'authenticity,' and ethnocultural codes of conduct. Understanding the changing conditions that produce girls' identities, and thus their practices of engagement and resistance, necessarily leads to reconceptualizing their identities as intersectional, multiply shaped and located, fluid, contradictory, and absolutely paradoxical.

Theoretical Gaps in Conceptualizing Minority Girlhoods

Central to my endeavour to draw forth a more complex analysis is the identification of gaps across theories that produce multiple erasures of racialized minority girls. Speaking to these gaps is critical to my analysis for two reasons: first, because it reveals the lack of critical tools for understanding minority girls' realities; and second, because it exposes how little we know about the practices of engagement and resistance girls utilize to manage and respond to these tensions. A most salient gap is the disconnection between meta-theoretical conceptualizations of postcolonialism and transnationalism and the practical applications of youth and girl work:

Considerable research has illuminated the ways historical, political and/or economic processes constitute and alter the meanings and ideologies of race and white domination, but much less has been done with respect to the more intimate, everyday processes that link the self to racial formations (Perry, 2002, p. 3).

Perry (2002) articulates what my review of the literature also reveals: There is a dearth of conceptual frameworks that juxtapose in helpful ways youth- and girl-centered applied theories with more critical transnational, Indigenous, or postcolonial analysis. As a result, racialized minority girls are poorly understood and inadequately represented across these important areas of study.

To briefly summarize points argued in Chapter 3, the first erasure of racialized minority girls occurs in dominant psychosocial representations of 'youth' and 'girlhood' that essentialize race, age, and gender. These theories ignore the heterogeneity among girls, while masking the uneven impacts of structural and material barriers to girls' engagement as full cultural citizens, knowledge producers, and community participants. Further, as I will argue in Chapter 6, the roots of PAR research lie predominantly in adult education and community development, two areas where the concerns and voices of girls have typically been ignored.

Below I discuss three additional troubling gaps that arise from my examination of postcolonial, Indigenous, and transnational feminist theories: (1) the dangers of appropriation and of 'relativisms of difference'; (2) the lack of application of theories to girls' lived realities; and (3) the discounting of girls' own practices of engagement and resistance.

Relativisms of Difference

As I discussed in Chapter 3, there is danger in blindly adopting the metaphorical traps of border crossing, multiplicity, and hybridity. These concepts serve as important counter-essentialist strategies; however, the limitations and potentially silencing effects of transgressing previously fixed analytical categories must be underlined. The pitfall is that 'difference talk' can reify problematic dichotomies of authenticity or purity through a 'relativism of difference' that uncritically celebrates all hybridizations as similarly produced and equally meaningful. To wit, Indigenous theorists argue that postcolonialism, as it has been taken up in mainstream Western theory and criticism, actually works to erase historicized sites of struggle and ongoing colonial power relations. In a similar vein, transnational feminists emphasize that Western feminism's construction of a universal 'womanhood' erases asymmetrical experiences of patriarchies among women. Hall (1997) concurs that the growing hybridization of our cultural

formations and identities creates paradoxical opportunities for both decolonization and recolonization:

Hybridity can be the call of both corporate multiculturalism at its most imperialistic, and of libratory alliances seeking justice; hybridity can be a positive resource for forming a heterogeneous community or an aggressive warning that some people will never belong here (p. 179).

While identity must be reconceptualized as a continuous, open-ended process, it is at once contextualized by individual circumstances and agency and mediated by powerful sociocultural and historical forces that permeate the contexts within which individual agency is exerted. Certainly the extent to which a girl becomes hybrid, syncretic, postcolonial, or transnational will vary based on factors of race, nationality, and/or class location. Racialized minority girls may have fewer opportunities to manoeuvre and make choices within hegemonic social formations than girls whose social location might provide buffers. And so, while theoretical reformulations of hybridity open up a greater plurality of forms that a girl might collate to produce new biographies of identity and social belonging, Hall (1997) stresses that the available choices are largely predetermined and carefully monitored.

Hall (1997) further emphasizes that this is a paradox of global mass culture on which transnational corporations and institutions, including universities, have already capitalized. The global postmodern, he argues, is

enormously absorptive, but the homogenization is never absolutely complete, nor does it work for completeness. It wants to recognize and absorb differences within a larger, overarching framework of what is essentially an American conception of the world. It does not attempt to obliterate differences: it operates *through* them (p. 176).

The corporate and institutional appropriation and commodification of hybrid identities undermines a praxis of resistance. Alongside our grassroots efforts occurs a different, more absorptive kind of neocolonialism that can appropriate our counter narratives.

Practical Applications to Girls

The second gap that concerns me relates to intellectual exclusivity, conceptual ambiguity, and a resulting lack of practical application, specifically to girls, of feminist, postcolonial, and Indigenous discourses of decolonization. The contributions of girlhood studies in theorizing girls' lived realities have been largely ignored in transnational feminisms. Transnational feminists typically assume a subject who is primarily a deterritorialized woman, with particular kinds of transnational knowledges, histories, and agencies; girls' experiences are collapsed into this subject (Bhavnani, 1990; Brah, 1996, 1992; Narayan & Harding, 2000). Transnational feminists' politicization of gender, race, class and nationhood has evolved to the detriment of other dimensions of difference, such as, and most relevant here, the role of age formations in structuring girls' experiences.

Gaps in Indigenous discourses also contribute to the underexamination of multipositioned girls. In contrast to transnational feminist concerns with transborder movement, Indigenous scholars privilege territorialized notions of rootedness, community, and nationhood as a way to further a self-governance agenda. These political discourses, focusing as they do on sovereignty and territorial and community cohesiveness, collapse important racialized, ethnicized, gendered, classed, and age-based positionalities into the project of nation building.¹⁷ As a consequence, the concerns of girls and women are underexamined (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Lawrence, 2004; Proulx, 2003).

¹⁷ Although the notion of transnationalism refers mainly to global migrants, I conceptualize Indigenous peoples as also transnational because of (1) their positioning as colonized and displaced subjects within Canada itself, paradoxically uprooted from territories and re-rooted into territorialized ethnic ghettos (i.e., reserves), and (2) because Indigenous peoples have always operated as transnational subjects with complex political, social, and economic interactions with other Indigenous nations and territories. A conceptualization of sovereign nations as already inherently complex and transnational counters the Euro-Western colonial imaginary of Aboriginal peoples as loosely organized, homogenous, and rooted populations.

Finally, postcolonial theories have been called to task for using elitist language “with few political implications, enabling a passive and comfortable—if linguistically sophisticated—intellectual quietism” (Adorno, cited in Friedman, 1998, p. 92).¹⁸ Lal (1996) contends that meta-theorizations of postcolonialism have limited their implications for social change “to *textual* practices” (p. 188). Theoretically transformative scholarship, while necessary, provides insufficient links and applications to tangible, material social change; missing are applications to the lives of those outside the realm of academic debates, notably those of girls.

The schism that separates theories of feminism and decolonization from girl-centered practices of social change further undermines the applications of these theories for girl-centered activism. This results in girls being largely excluded from full participation as producers of knowledge about themselves, not only within the confines of their social environments, but within the conceptual confines of these fields of study.

Girls’ Agency and Engagement

The final conceptual gap I examine here traverses all these theories and leads to the core of my dissertation. As I underscored in Chapter 3, our theories and practices do not fully recognize the strategies that racialized girls employ to negotiate the complex cultural spheres of their everyday lives. The endeavour to understand how girls make sense of and respond to the discourses, practices, and policies that constitute them as racialized, gendered, classed, sexed subjects is central to my explication of TE. After all, Griffin (2004) argues that girls are “constituted as objects at the intersection of a number of competing claims to truth. In other words, there is nothing ‘essential’ about girlhood; it

¹⁸ Discourses of postcolonialism have been shaped and explicated by the ‘high theorists’ of post-colonialism. The most prolific, such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall, represent the diasporic intellectual (and largely male) elite of the world’s large postcolonial metropoli such as London, New York and Delhi.

is always produced and negotiated (by us, but especially by girls) in particular historical and political moments” (p. 32).

The assumption in existing psychosocial models that girls are automatically socialized into predetermined gender, ethnic, or cultural characteristics minimizes girls’ agency in making active sense of, negotiating, and resisting social formations. According to Weaver (1990), gaps in existing psychological frameworks preclude us from understanding the strategies that enable girls to move within and across geographic and sociocultural borders, identities, ethnicities, and languages. These theories fail to explicate the types of knowledges and skills that girls develop through this daily juggling act while dealing with systemic patriarchies. Brown and Gilligan (1992) contend that girls’ relational strategies are “unknown, and therefore unacknowledged and unappreciated” (p. 10). Incongruence between theories and girls’ lived experiences becomes a barrier to investigating the juxtaposition of global forces and local contexts that shape their identities and thus, their practices of engagement.

Taking it a step further, a report of the Search Institute (2003) on developmental assets among youth of colour noted that “the public, media, policy makers and researchers too often focus only on the problems these young people face, leaving a gap in knowledge and dialogue about the strengths of young people of color” (p. 1). The predominant picture of minority girls as fractured, under psychological distress, and vulnerable to high risk factors forecloses a more textured representation of girls’ capacity to respond to and resist colonial and patriarchal formations.

These gaps are most obvious among debates on youth participation, a central theme of my study and one I explicate in Chapter 10. Homogenous, mainstream models for youth participation lead to a quantification of certain kinds of leadership and engagement, and discount girls’ unique forms of sociocultural, political, and economic participation. The result is even less comprehension of how girls engage with multiple

patriarchies, feminist concepts and values, global changes, and the diversity in their own lives. This is a strong incentive for a new conceptual framework that offers a correspondingly complex nomenclature of racialized girlhood and that supports girls in amplifying their own voices and practices of engagement.

Disciplinary Cross-Pollinations: A Conceptual Nexus

Given dizzyingly rapid global movements, and the abstraction of theoretical frameworks to describe them, how can we use research to elucidate the hidden experiences of racialized girls? How do we develop a transformative praxis based on a beneficial intersection of (1) sociological conceptualizations of global, transnational, postcolonial, and decolonization processes; (2) participatory and emancipatory practices and methodologies; and (3) girl-centered research and practice? And, how do we generate political or social change, beyond theoretical applications, that speaks to girls' practices of resistance and engagement? Finally, what implications and recommendations can we draw towards creating truly girl-centered research, policy, and practice?

I ponder these pivotal questions in a vacuum of theories by which to highlight the textures of racialized girlhoods. Most notable in this respect, in addition to the gaps I have identified, is the dearth of useful cross-pollination among these theories. Although transnational feminists, postcolonial theorists, and Indigenous scholars share some overlapping concerns, they tend to underexamine each other. Their theorizations, grounded in debates and agendas that relate only to their own communities, and positioned primarily in relation to dominant Whiteness, can only be partial. None of these theoretical models speaks to the entirety of the intersections in my own identity, nor to those revealed during analysis of "It's About Us."

This vacuum provides a compelling argument for the value of a conceptual translation among different fields: "At the very least, we need a framework that overrides

these forms of disengagement—a cross-disciplinary framework that accommodates multiple identities and oppressions and that suggests connections between academic inquiry and social action” (Messer-Davidow, 1991, p. 290). My transdisciplinary model engages across and within these perspectives at a horizontal level, without having to constantly engage with the dominant lens. I reemphasize that this compilation is somewhat artificial in the sense that not all of these theories share conceptual affinities. Though I highlight a partial picture of each model, I do so with a view to building a hybrid research epistemology that acknowledges vertical, horizontal, and scattered connections among marginalized researchers and girls from disparate subjectivities. The length of this dissertation underscores the difficulty that confronts me in crafting a conceptual whole at a transdisciplinary nexus.

Despite the difficulties inherent in conceptual translation, it is clear that a multifaceted analysis provides “an important reminder of the multiple and contradictory nature of subjectivity, hence of the complexities of working with the stories of outsiders who resist domination” (Razack, 1993, p. 6). The complexities Razack (1993) describes are part of the difficulty we face in exploring transformative practices with girls. Whether they involve resistance or marginalization, the impact of shifting postcolonial formations on girls is neither universal nor easily encapsulated by one analytical category. Disciplinary cross-pollinations, I argue, allow productive conjunctures for a praxis of resistance that innovates new narratives of girlhood.

CHAPTER 5:

ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR “IT’S ABOUT US”: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The “It’s About Us” project responded to racialized minority girls’ requests for a ‘space of their own’ in which to explore their experiences of gendered racialization in a predominantly White Canadian city. This chapter describes the enabling conditions for the emergence of this knowledge; our unique research design supported and expanded the girls’ practices of resistance and engagement. Through their involvement in community development and social action, the girls contributed invaluable knowledge about how they negotiate social formations related to gender, race, class, nationality, sex, and age. Our research team drew on principles of community-based participatory feminist research to center the girls’ concerns about social belonging, citizenship formation, participation, and community development. The iterative research design was grounded in expressive methods that included popular theatre, photography, and art. Procedural data were garnered from focus group discussions, theatre sessions and scripts, participant-observation, journaling, and photo-ethnography.

In this chapter, to provide context for my research, I first provide an overview of the history and design of the larger project in which “It’s About Us” was embedded. Next, through a discussion of terminology, I introduce the ideologies and objectives that guided our research design, methodology, and documentation process. Finally, I expand on the methodological framework of my dissertation.

The “It’s About Us” Research Project: History and Background

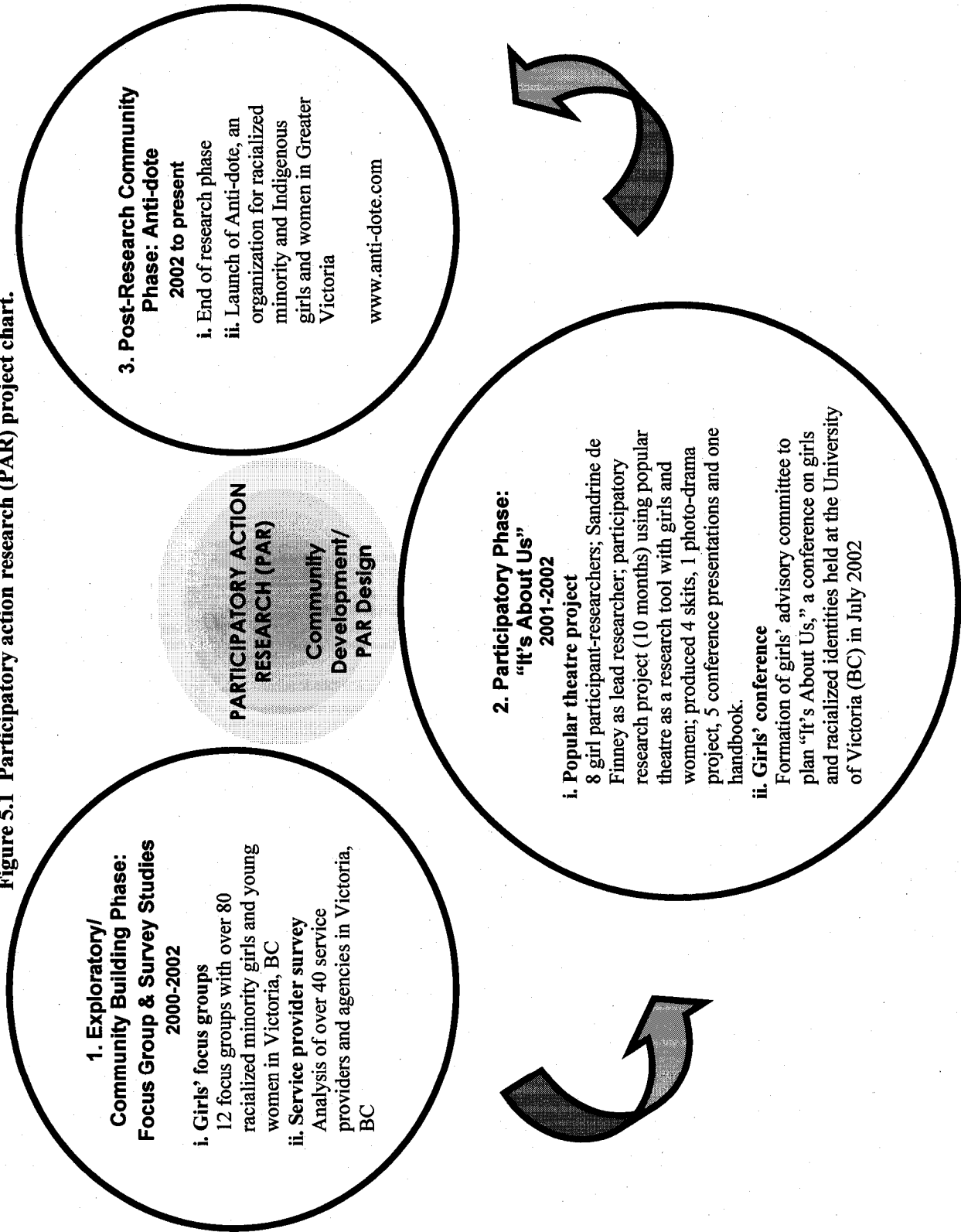
As noted in Chapter 1, the theatre-focused “It’s About Us” project was part of a multiphase study headed by Dr. Jo-Anne Lee. This larger study investigated social cohesion and the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in the lives of racialized

girls.¹⁹ Dr. Lee's research project, based in Victoria, British Columbia, was grounded in an emergent, feminist, participatory research design that involved numerous community and research partners. For clarity of discussion, I have organized the study into three discrete phases, illustrated in Figure 5.1: (1) the exploratory focus group/survey phase; (2) the participatory phase, including the "It's About Us" theatre project; and (3) the post-research phase, where research participants formed Anti-dote.²⁰ It must be understood, however, that characteristic of the fluid nature of PAR, these components overlapped in time, content, and process.

¹⁹ Dr. Lee's study on racialized minority girls in Victoria formed one component of a national SSHRC-funded study conducted with partners from the University of British Columbia and Concordia University. This larger study was entitled "The Intersectionality of Race and Gender in Social Cohesion: An Examination of Factors Influencing Identity Formation, Experiences of Violence, and Integration of Marginalized Girls in Canadian Society."

²⁰ My research project, "It's About Us," was Phase 2 of the larger, 3-phase study.

Figure 5.1 Participatory action research (PAR) project chart.



Exploratory, Community-Building Phase: Focus Group/Survey Studies

Dr. Lee's research project, in which I acted as research director, began with an exploratory, community-building study of girls, young women, and service providers in Victoria.²¹ We conducted ethno-specific and ethnically mixed focus groups with approximately 70 racialized girls and young women ranging in age from 12 to mid-20s. This phase also included a Victoria-wide survey of local service providers and agencies, who participated both in focus groups and in an on-line survey (see Lee, 2004a, 2004b). These data helped us to identify themes related to girls' and young women's experiences of identity formation in Victoria.²² Prevalent themes included girls' experiences of inclusion/exclusion and erasure in dominant White contexts, processes of identity formation in relation to representations of racialized minority girls, experiences of resistance and advocacy, gaps in services and opportunities for self-advocacy by and for girls, and girls' desires to become more involved in peer outreach and public education (Lee, 2004b, 2005).

This exploratory study provided the foundation for "It's About Us," the participatory, action-oriented phase. Ideally, PAR should be initiated and shaped from the ground up by the participants themselves. Realistically, however—and especially in terms of community research involving young people and people of colour—researchers, resources, and participants become engaged along a continuum throughout the project, and community capacity becomes crystallized through a 'scaffolding' of participation and involvement. Although such a generative process is by no means detached from broader issues about minority girls' limited access to funding, power, status, and methods of

²¹ I briefly describe this phase here; it is not addressed in detail in my dissertation.

²² Drawing on input from our research partners and community advisory team, our research team engaged in a process of collective analysis to identify pilot themes and questions, which we revised and applied in a series of 20 focus groups. We cross-referenced these data and assembled preliminary themes for use in the participatory phase of the study.

knowledge production and dissemination in research, it is a realistic representation of the way many youth-focused PAR projects tend to proceed.

In our case, reflecting the relative isolation and the lack of targeted supports for racialized minority girls in Victoria, no organized network existed for us to tap into and from which we could launch a comprehensive participatory project. We started instead with a loosely based network of young girls brought together by friendships, existing community networks, and the research itself. Before an organic participatory process could get off the ground, we needed to build an organizational base from which to explore and document the current context, identify themes and goals, and build leadership and capacity. At this juncture, Dr. Lee's extensive skills as a community organizer and researcher, Eugenie Lam's knowledge of research protocols, my experience with community and youth-based practice, and the extensive personal and professional networks of our advisory members allowed an extensive network to flourish. We contacted dozens of minority girls and women, including ICA employees, volunteers, and clients and some of Dr. Lee's undergraduate students. Many of the young women, some of whom we hired as research assistants, recruited their younger family members and friends to participate in focus groups.

This exploratory phase was essential in helping us to establish a cohesive analytical framework, establish precursory entry points into our burgeoning community, and galvanize involvement in the participatory phase of the study. Slowly, a community of girls and young women emerged who, through their feedback as participants, advisors, and co-researchers, shaped a strong vision for the "It's About Us" project. A critical outcome of this phase was the creation of a database of contact information for more than 100 racialized girls and women, many of whom attended our girls' conference the following year.

Participatory Phase: "It's About Us"

The participatory phase, to which this dissertation is devoted, was directly shaped by the findings and the social networks generated by the exploratory focus group study. "It's About Us" was a response to girls' requests for opportunities to continue exploring their experiences with other girls 'like themselves' and to engage in a broader process of public education and community change. The "It's About Us" theatre project was the primary research vehicle in this phase, which also included a girls' conference held at the University of Victoria in the summer of 2002. These projects formed part of a broader strategy to support local girls in becoming more visible and in building critical mass and leadership skills.

To bring to life the research process and its diverse participants, I have included some photographs depicting participants from our 2002 conference and the "It's About Us" theatre project (see Appendix 1).²³

Community-Based Phase

As previously noted, the research generated several community-based initiatives, including the creation of Anti-dote (www.anti-dote.org), a community organization grounded in the themes and findings of the study. I describe Anti-dote in further detail in Chapter 15.

Developing a Project Design and Objectives

The goal of the "It's About Us" popular theatre project was to produce a short play or series of skits, developed and performed by the girls, to present at our girls' conference. Although we anticipated that the theatre project would engender future

²³ Because of the public nature of this project, we had multiple layers of guidelines around confidentiality and anonymity, and all research and conference participants signed consent forms agreeing to the use of their image.

community initiatives, its process and outcomes were always emerging and thus unpredictable. We knew we had only 10-12 months to develop accessible methodologies that would provide the girls with concrete, transferable skills for leadership and community advocacy. Popular theatre seemed like a good fit since several of us had an interest and/or previous experience in this area. We had several purposes in mind. First, we wanted to engage a group of committed girls and women in a process of collaborative and critical research about their lives. We felt that popular theatre would provide rich methods for girls to examine and make visible their experiences of identity, invisibility, and (un)belonging in predominantly White spaces. We also saw applied theatre as an effective vehicle for expanding and interpreting the stories collected during the exploratory, community-building phase of the larger study. As such, the project was an important strategy for reporting back to the girls who attended the focus groups in Phase 1 (and those who continued to work with us), as well as to their broader communities. Finally, beyond the direct experiences of our small research team, we wanted the project to provide avenues for critical discussion and social action about girls' experiences of racialization in Victoria. We hoped that the theatre pieces could be presented at conferences and community events, and that they would serve as the impetus for other girl-led initiatives. As I have described, the project did in fact help us spearhead several community-based initiatives. Our broader goal was to use the project as a medium for fostering personal and community transformation, public education, and social action.

The Research Team

The research team consisted of six girls between the ages of 14 and 17 and four women over 18 years of age, all of whom identify as racialized minority, immigrant, refugee, and/or Indigenous girls and women. The girls who completed the entire project

were Taisha, Prisha, Jillien, Evelyn, Barbara, and Manjeet.²⁴ The women team members were Jo-Anne Lee, Eugenie Lam, Susana Garcia, and me.

Recruitment and Group Building

When we initiated “It’s About Us,” we benefited from the momentum generated by the peer connections forged during the focus group phase of the study. Our common history of involvement in the project provided a familiar network from which the girls could become involved in the next phase of the project. Working from within this network, we approached a small group of girls and representing a variety of backgrounds and experiences. I knew some of the girls through my front-line work at our partner agency, the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA). Some of these relationships were well established (i.e., a few years old) and involved professional and personal connections with the girls’ families. Our research team met the other girls through referrals when they agreed to participate in our initial focus groups. Without this preexisting network of community partnerships and connections with girls and families, we would have had to implement a more extensive process of relationship building for recruitment.

About half the girls who agreed to participate in the theatre project had little or no experience with theatre, public speaking, anti-racism education or community building work. Three of the girls (Leila, Taisha, and Manjeet) had participated in “Voices Heard,” an award-winning community theatre program for anti-racism education. These three girls had extensive experience in public speaking and workshop facilitation and had delivered presentations to audiences across British Columbia.

²⁴ Despite the public nature of the project, I have opted to use code names to protect the girls’ anonymity in the more intimate data presented here.

Girl Team Members

The girls lived in different parts of Victoria and had diverse class, ethnic, religious, cultural, and family backgrounds. All six girls attended local public schools. One attended junior high; the other five attended high school. Where possible, in describing the girl team members, I have used descriptors the girls themselves used when filling out our recruitment forms or during project activities.

Barbara, 16, had immigrated to Canada from China at about age 6. Her parents, who travelled a lot for business, lived in Vancouver and China much of the time, so Barbara lived with her grandparents, aunt, and cousin Evelyn, who was also in the project. Barbara was in her last year of high school at a middle-class school in the suburbs. She was focused on her studies and was planning a career in science or medicine. She wanted “to be successful” and said that she was “always stressed out” about her grades. Barbara was one of the few girls in the project who had a boyfriend, whom she brought to some of the sessions. Barbara described herself as “determined,” “really proud of being Chinese,” and “wanting to go far in life.”

Evelyn, 14, had immigrated to Canada at about age 8. Evelyn attended a middle-class junior high school in the same suburban neighbourhood as her cousin Barbara’s school. Both girls were active in music and dance and spoke Mandarin exclusively at home. Barbara and Evelyn were very close, and the supportive and protective nature of their relationship was an important factor in Evelyn’s continued involvement in the project. Evelyn was the youngest of the participants; she described herself as “the baby of the group” and as a “quiet but not really shy” person who “love[s] acting” and “speak[s] my mind.”

Manjeet, 17, was born in Victoria; her parents had immigrated from the Punjab in the 1960s. Manjeet’s older sister had been a research assistant during the focus groups and was coordinating our girls’ conference; she recruited Manjeet to participate in the

South Asian focus group. Manjeet, who attended the same school as Barbara, described herself as “brown, Punjabi, South Asian.” Shortly before joining “It’s About Us,” Manjeet had also started working with the Voices Heard group. She became an active member of both groups, helping to organize our conference and representing Anti-dote at several conferences and community events, both locally and nationally. In Manjeet’s words: “We absolutely have to talk about this, it is badly needed, we have to let people in charge know about what we experience on a daily basis.”

Jillien, 16, lived with her mother and sister in a low-income neighbourhood. She often had to take several buses to get to our sessions, so we made an effort to pick her up whenever we could.²⁵ Jillien had met some of our research assistants while volunteering at a local multicultural event in town; she signed up for the focus groups and, later, the theatre project. She became one of Anti-dote’s first board members. Recently she became the coordinator of our Anti-dote summer programs for girls, and she has represented Anti-dote at several national events. Jillien is active in local anti-racism organizations, and she has been involved in producing several short films about the experiences of girls and women of colour.

Taisha, 16, was born in the Sudan to Ethiopian parents and raised in the Sudan and Ethiopia. Her father came to Canada during the Ethiopian civil war and then sponsored his wife and daughter. I met Taisha in a reception program for refugee children at a local elementary school about five months after she had moved to Victoria, when she was about 11. I have known her family since then, and Taisha and I have participated together in many community-based initiatives. She regularly attended my group for immigrant youth, and she also took our leadership and facilitation training. Taisha was

²⁵ The girls received bus tickets to attend sessions, but we found that tickets did not do enough to enhance accessibility, especially when we had scheduled performances. For some of the girls, the bus trip was over an hour, so we often used our personal vehicles to pick them up and drop them off.

one of the original members of Voices Heard and had performed dozens of anti-racism theatre presentations when she joined the research project. She is currently an Anti-dote board member. It was Taisha who named our project “It’s About Us”; she described it as “a chance to have something I wanted for a long time, just for girls to say what we need to say. I’m excited about it.”

Prisha, 16, was born in Iran and had immigrated to Victoria with her mother and younger sister. Her father is a businessman who continues to live and work in Iran, coming to Canada for visits and holidays. The family has gone back to Iran twice since moving to Victoria. Prisha attended the same inner-city high school as Taisha. She and her sister also attended my immigrant youth group. At the start of the project, Prisha’s family had only been living in Victoria for about a year, but she had quickly made friends at school and sometimes brought them along to performances and presentations. Prisha describes herself as a “loud and proud” Muslim. Although she is not currently an Anti-dote board member, Prisha was actively involved in the conference planning and has attended quite a few conferences on behalf of Anti-dote.

Adult Team Members

The adult research team for the theatre project consisted of three University of Victoria researchers, Jo-Anne Lee (principal investigator), Eugenie Lam (administrative coordinator), and myself (lead researcher), and, as theatre director, Susana Garcia, director of a local popular theatre company.²⁶ Henceforth, I will refer to all team members by first name. I have also opted to use code names for all members except for the three university researchers, who do not fall under the same ethical considerations for protecting anonymity.

²⁶ We also worked with Eva Campbell, an illustrator and art history PhD student. Eva’s drawings are presented in later chapters. Eva also developed the logo for our girls’ conference, which later became the logo for Anti-dote.

Susana Garcia came to Canada as a refugee from South America and founded a popular theatre company in Victoria. Susana has directed numerous well-received community productions, plays, and video documentaries depicting the experiences of immigrant and visible minority families.²⁷

Eugenie Lam, who had immigrated from Hong Kong to Vancouver, B.C. at the age of 5, was the administrative coordinator for the theatre project and a research director for the larger project. Eugenie conducted many of the initial focus groups, coordinated the service provider survey, and recruited several of the Asian girls for “It’s About Us.” She had an in-depth understanding of the project design and goals and was an invaluable part of the team.

Jo-Anne Lee, Associate Professor in the Department of Women’s Studies at the University of Victoria, was born in Vancouver, B.C. to first-generation Chinese-Canadian parents. Jo-Anne grew up in the heart of Vancouver’s Chinatown; as a teenager, she helped her mother to organize resistance to urban renewal. Jo-Anne’s extensive experience as a community activist and organizer, adult educator, community-based researcher, and women’s studies scholar provided the organizational and analytical expertise required for this type of research.

Sandrine de Finney.²⁸ As lead researcher under Jo-Anne’s supervision, I had two main roles. Initially, I was the research coordinator, responsible for managing the project design and methodologies, coordinating data collection, and facilitating project communications and planning. About a month and a half into the project, I also took over the role of theatre facilitator. At that point, I became responsible for designing and facilitating the theatre sessions with the girls, as well as our public performances and

²⁷ I had previously attended some of Susana’s training on Theatre of the Oppressed, but I had never worked with her in a community setting with girls.

²⁸ I have described my background in previous sections; here, I discuss my role as participant-researcher.

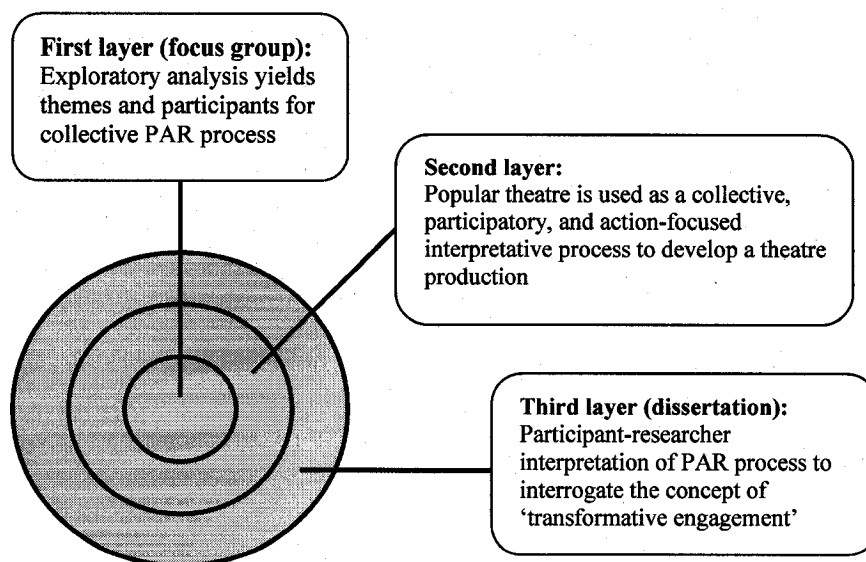
conference presentations. Although we worked collaboratively, I specify my own roles in the project primarily to clarify the focus and scope of my dissertation and of my work as a graduate student. In my roles as lead researcher and theatre facilitator, I carried out the following activities:

1. Coordination of the overall project design and planning, including the development of research methodologies; coordination of sessions, presentations, and workshops; and liaison with girls, families, and community groups.
2. Development of all materials and documentation, including consent forms and letters to parents, referral forms, contracts, theatre scripts, journaling, and evaluations.
3. In collaboration with Susana Garcia, facilitation of the popular theatre sessions, drawing primarily on the principles and methods used in Theatre of the Oppressed.
4. Facilitation of the project, including implementation of the research design, planning and facilitation of activities and rehearsals, and facilitation of workshop and conference presentations.
5. Coordination of evaluation tools and other data collection methods.
6. Development and facilitation of training for girls and research assistants.

My dissertation focuses only on the data collected during and after the participatory popular theatre phase. These data were collected through focus groups, theatre sessions and scripts, participant-observation, journaling and photo-ethnography. To further conceptualize my role in the different phases of this large and complex project, I identify three interrelated layers of interpretation relevant to my study in Figure 5.2 below. My dissertation (the third layer) comprises a critical extension of the data from the

second layer; this supplementary meta-analysis²⁹ contributes original interpretation, theory building, and findings related to my pivot concept (Ball, 1984) of girls' transformative engagement. The concept of transformative engagement (TE) was constructed during my subsequent data analysis; it was not defined a priori as a provided analytic concept or an intended methodological focus of the original study.

Figure 5.2 Layers of interpretation.



Terminology

Terminology and the Construction of Partnerships

The composition of our research team shifted throughout the project, with each member taking on different levels of responsibility and leadership, and with team members and partners entering and leaving the project at various points. Although we each focused on specific areas of interest and expertise, our team worked within an

²⁹ I use the term 'meta-analysis' not as way of claiming knowledge that transcends the other layers, but to describe a systematic process of critical reflection and conceptualization that situates project processes and outcomes in relation to broader discussions, literatures, and applications.

iterative collaborative framework, in keeping with PAR principles, that involved continuous negotiation, discussion, support, and shifting of roles. Thus, rather than claim this research and its outcomes entirely as my own, in many parts of this dissertation I use the terms 'we' and 'our' to reflect the collective nature of the project. However, I must specify that my use of 'we' is by no means an attempt to homogenize or discount our diverse perspectives or to claim that my interpretation represents other group members.

I also use the terms 'research team' and 'participant-researchers' as a deliberate strategy to disturb the hierarchical nature of the relationship between 'researcher as expert' and 'research subject as object of study' that is assumed in positivist research designs. However, although these terms portray team members as partners and collaborative contributors to the research, our efforts to disturb traditional research hierarchies often remained an aspirational practice. As I illustrate throughout this dissertation, our partnership-building strategies sometimes backfired, serving instead to obscure and legitimize deeply embedded power dynamics.

Clearly, the benefits of 'equalizing' terminologies are neither instantaneous nor intrinsic. Rather they must be deliberately and consistently struggled for and actualized through the everyday work of the research, and their intentional and unintentional outcomes must be evaluated throughout the project. Despite the challenges, I argue that collaborative, democratic research work can be compatible with intergenerational mentoring, skill building, and shifting levels of leadership between women, young women, and girls.

I am also aware that I use collective terminology in a contradictory juxtaposition with a more traditional university-mandated structure that clearly delineates 'principal investigator,' 'research director/coordinator,' and 'participant' roles. I use all of these terms deliberately in an attempt to realistically represent the complicated border crossings and negotiations in which minority and Indigenous researchers must engage to access

research spaces. My insistence on specifying Jo-Anne's role as principal investigator, for instance, reflects the degree to which our team relied on her to open up access to research funding, academic networks, community-building skills, and an analytical framework that spoke to our experiences. For instance, Jo-Anne guided me through my overlapping roles as participant-researcher, research coordinator, and graduate student. I benefited enormously from working with an academic mentor who used her capacity as lead researcher to open doors for the other team members and who offered insights into the struggles that Indigenous and minority women face in academia.

Terminology and the Construction of Girlhoods

The use of the terms 'girl,' 'young woman,' 'woman,' and 'adult' in the research project as a whole, and in my dissertation in particular, warrants clarification. I have opted to use the terms 'girls' and 'women' to differentiate between the younger (under the age of 18) and older (over the age of 25) members of our research team. Those between the ages of 19 and 24 are categorized as 'young women.' This choice raises several important considerations related to shifting sociohistorical constructions of 'girlhood,' 'womanhood,' and 'femininity.' The terms 'girl' and 'woman' have loaded histories: The mid 20th-century industrial-era understanding of adulthood as the accomplishment of an autonomous transition from youth was male-centered and did not account for girls and women. According to this construction, mature femininity required dependency, thus denying girls status as adults; this is evidenced in the discourse that commonly referred to female adults as 'girls.' Consequently, second-wave feminists insisted on using the terms 'woman' and 'young woman' to signify mature or adult status and to contest the infanticization of women. In the past twenty years, the term 'girl' has been reappropriated to contest the erasure of girls' concerns and voices within feminism. As such, this term has become an important site of struggle for girlhood and feminist studies.

While the categories of 'girl' and 'woman' are socially constituted and constituting and, as such, are malleable and contestable, they also capture meaningful differences in the lives of girls and women that our research could not afford to ignore. Therefore, in both using and challenging 'girl' as a category, I draw on an analytical framework that insists on the need "to investigate the material and ideological specificities of any particular moment which constitutes girls as being only one kind of being or another" (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 4). The difficulty in working within and around such categories accentuates the problem of how to document, represent, and contest girlhoods without re-essentializing them. It is difficult to fully resolve the paradox of describing girlhood while claiming that its characterization is problematic and elusive. This difficulty is due, in part, to a lack of critical language to articulate not only intersecting discourses of age, gender, race, class, ability, and citizenship in relation to girlhood, but our own role, as researchers, in actively constituting discursive girlhoods by writing from and against them. I make these tensions as transparent as possible, but I am fully aware of the conundrum inherent in claiming to represent and deconstruct problematic categories as a way of unsettling their essentializing effects while at the same time reifying a category of 'racialized, minority girls' as the focus of my analysis.

Within our own team, we had numerous debates about how to best acknowledge terminology and differences among team members. On one hand, discourses of girlhood and womanhood inevitably constructed the team members as belonging to falsely essentialized and dichotomized categories, while collapsing differences within, outside, and between girls and women. On the other hand, important distinctions which relate to experiences of girlhood would have been inappropriately subsumed under the universal category of 'woman' or some other common denominator. Taisha, identifying a strategic need to name herself and her experiences as distinct from those of women, demanded to know:

What's wrong with calling us girls? That's what we are. I'm not an adult, I have my own opinion and I think girls need our own space where adults don't take over. We have our own opinions to share, and they're different.

As Taisha observes, age is not merely one more factor to be added to how we understand race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and citizenship in women's lives. Age is itself a constituting element of girlhood, femininity, and womanhood:

Thinking about girlhood and how it intersects with categories of social difference is not simply then about adding on extras or special sections to a basic formula. Rather, girls become girls through their negotiation of raced, classed and sexed femininities (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 3).

In our own project, we needed to acknowledge our power in constructing the girls as other than women or as in the process of becoming women—with all the pitfalls this choice implies—while taking advantage of the potential offered by creating spaces where girls could define their own concerns and experiences. Just as the concept of womanhood has become politicized, girlhood has been not only a site of struggle and erasure, but a position from which to form political identity to strategically resist and advocate for girl-centered language, policies, and social services.

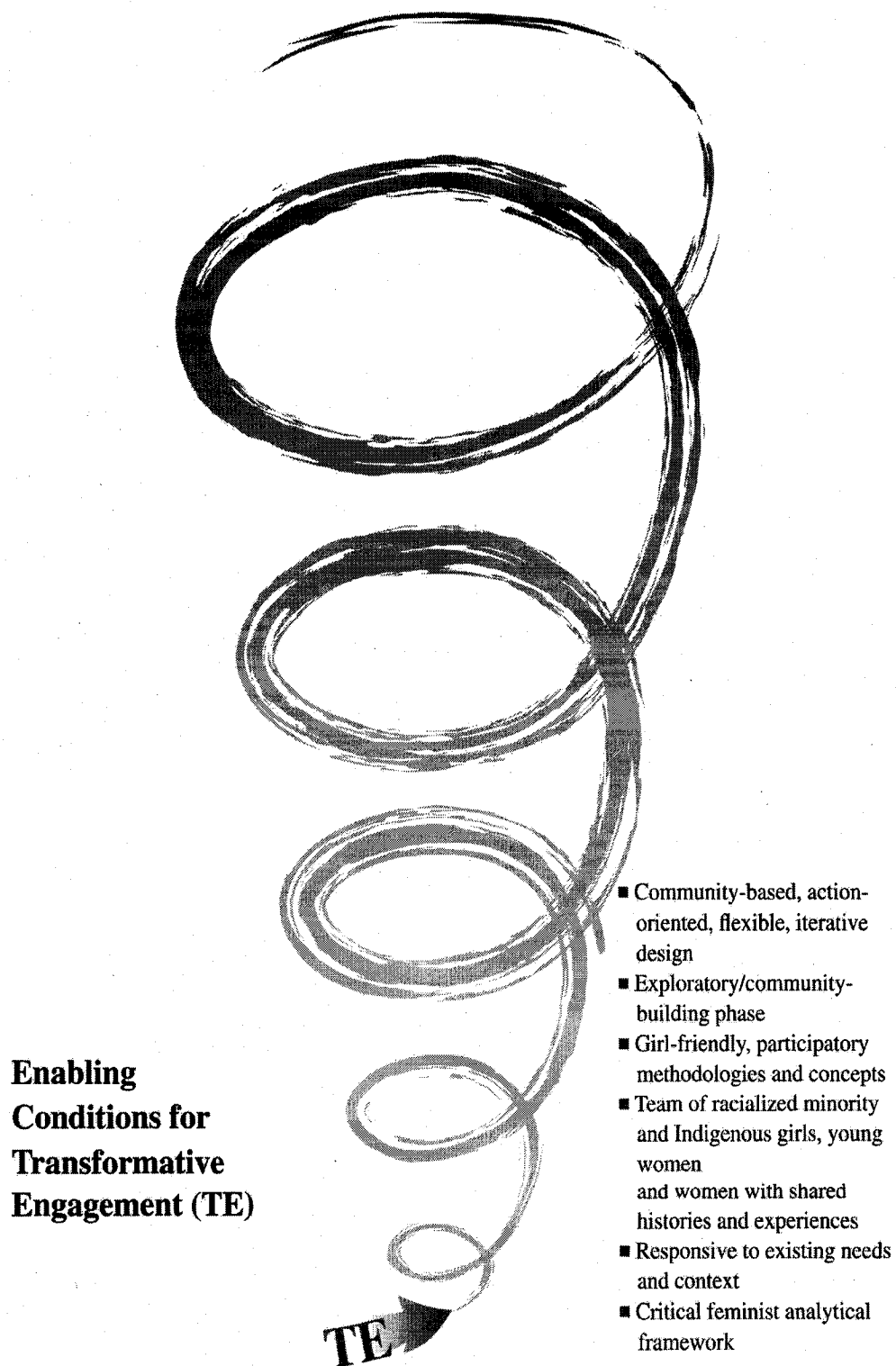
While fluid and context specific, discourses about age structure the ways in which girls and women process their experiences, the tools and resources to which they have access, the context of their social, political, and economic engagement, and the nature of their intergenerational relationships. Despite girls' and women's different social positionings, age does not mitigate the painful effects of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and so on, nor is it representative of the capacity of girls, young women, and women to take leadership roles or to mentor and support one another. Presumptions about mentoring and leadership capacity that are based on chronological or social conceptualizations of age as a barometer of maturity or ability are highly paternalistic; they also limit opportunities to question how discourses of age construct narrow social roles for both girls and women.

Enabling Conditions for the Emergence of TE

In this chapter I have highlighted the conditions which enabled the development of the “It’s About Us” study and as a result, the transformative engagement of its participants. These enabling conditions included: flexible, critical use of terminology; methodologies that promoted the emergence of critical consciousness about issues facing racialized girls and women in Victoria; investment in a critical community building phase; a girl-centered, flexible, open-ended research design; and a research team constituted of insiders to the experience of gendered racialization (see Figure 5.3). “It’s About Us” responded to participants’ requests for a space of their own in which to explore their experiences of gendered racialization in a predominantly White city. The project design succeeded in providing the enabling conditions to deepen and sustain the girls’ involvement in community development through research and thus the emergence of TE.

Figure 5.3 Enabling conditions for the emergence of TE.

ENABLING CONDITIONS OF TE



Although the research was grounded in feminist and community-building principles, our design was neither linear nor predetermined. We continuously adapted our methods and goals in response to the evolving PAR process. Our use of hybrid, fluid, subversive methodologies, while conducive to healing and transformation, also created spaces of tension and epistemic limbo.

Given that girls' and women's experiences are constituted historically and discursively within the social realm, it is not surprising that we struggled with constructing and being constructed as either/or within our own research. While we quickly assumed belonging to categories of 'girl,' 'young woman,' or 'woman' by nature of our chronological ages and our self and group ascriptions, in reality, the lines between girls and women were often blurred. This indeterminacy reflects the inadequacy of singular, linear categories for relating incongruous processes of identity formation. These important distinctions are integral to my dissertation, with many implications for conceptualizing and working with girls as a way to inform debates about girlhood as a social process.

Another struggle we faced was how to develop approaches that could uncover problematic language and discourses without re-essentializing our subject positions as 'native informants,' repositories of 'true' or authentic knowledge about colonized subjectivities. We journeyed through the research process with limited language by which to name ourselves—a symptom of the dearth of epistemic spaces within which feminist, decolonizing academic counter work can emerge. Although we strategized around our common experiences as racialized girls and women living under Whiteness, we also worked to avoid the pitfalls of 'ethnic cheerleading' (Ladson-Billings, 2003) or any essentialized sense of 'mythical solidarity' (Minh-ha, 1997). Instead, I claim these difficult historicized sites of struggle strategically, as a method to displace, disrupt, and transgress essentialized binaries and epistemic containment.

CHAPTER 6:
WORKING THE GAPS: METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES IN
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

While no mythical solidarities exist that can neatly homogenize differences among and between minority and Indigenous women and girls, I argue that collaborative, community-based, participatory feminist research can create purposeful ones. Smith (1999) conceives of “researching back” as a way to “talk back” to the stronghold of positivist research (p. 7); I conceive also of ‘researching forward.’ Transformative engagement gathers momentum through research as subversive Trickster praxis, bringing girls and women together to engage in research that promotes self-determination, decolonization, and social justice. In the next two chapters, I explore in greater detail the two main approaches that worked to advance this goal in the “It’s About Us” project: feminist participatory action research (FPAR) and popular theatre (PT).

In this chapter, I focus specifically on the spectrum of PAR. The umbrella methodology of PAR guided our study design as a whole and framed our community development and social change strategies. PAR’s explicitly politicized stance on knowledge production and focus on community involvement made it ideologically compatible with our analytical framework. PAR principles and approaches were woven through the many strands of our research, including our girls’ conference, the creation of Anti-dote, our girls’ advisory committee, and, of course, the “It’s About Us” theatre project. We used PT as our principal data collection tool; its relational, experiential nature helped to animate the principles of PAR and feminist community development.

We drew on some of the few examples of PAR research projects that use expressive methodologies and involve girls and young women as co-researchers.³⁰

Working the Gaps

While I present PAR and PT as promising approaches for feminist research with racialized minority girls and women, I situate these claims to success in relation to gaps and tensions that exist in both methods. The implementation of these methodologies is often fraught with conceptual, practical, and ethical complexities due, in part, to tensions between their core principles and practices and a community's highly contextual histories and concerns (Hall, 1992). Further, neither PAR nor PT is an inherently transformative medium disassociated from existing power dynamics embedded in modes of research production. Indigenous, feminist, queer, and youth-centered theorists, among others, have rightly questioned claims to empowerment, democratic research, community participation, and equal access in studies that have employed these methodologies.

Much can be learned from the challenges we faced in working within these tensions. Our efforts to address debates about appropriation, power, and participation were critical to the integrity of our implementation of FPAR and PT and to the creation of enabling conditions for the emergence of TE. We required methodological strategies for a critical feminist analysis that resonated with the girls' own goals for community development and social change and that offered them creative, flexible tools to foster voice and agency. In this respect, both methodologies leave unexamined the most salient complexities of our own project: negotiating action research in a predominantly White

³⁰ For example, Piran (2001) describes a PAR study where girls used focus groups, theatre, journaling, and photographs to interrogate and speak back to oppressive constructions of girls' bodies. Nylund and Ceske (1997) worked with girls who used film and photography to document spaces of exclusion in their schools. In a Punjabi project, girls employed digital video to covertly document child labour; they also used banners, art, and photography to explore teacher violence against girls (Etherton, 2004). See also Cahill, Arenas, Contreras, et al. (2004); Gallagher (2001a); Lobenstine, Pereira, Whitley, et al. (2004).

research site, with an emerging and under-resourced community network, and with a research team comprised exclusively of members typically excluded from modes of knowledge production—minority women and girls. We were faced with a dearth of examples to draw from that combined postcolonial or transnational feminist analysis, applications suited to racialized minority girls' experiences, and attention to the challenges researchers face in working with their own community. My conceptualization of TE exposes the messiness of these conceptual, theoretical, and practical dilemmas, enabling it to complicate easy assumptions about the applications and benefits of transformative community-based research (CBR).

Participatory Action Research (PAR): An Overview

PAR incorporates a broad spectrum of approaches, methodologies, and conceptual frameworks.³¹ Here I focus on iterations of PAR that speak to colonized communities in the Western world. One innovator in this area is Budd Hall, a North American researcher, activist, and architect of PAR (1975, 1981, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1998, 2000a, 2000b). In a groundbreaking issue of *Convergence* in 1975, in which he coined the term “participatory action research,” Hall articulated the value of an approach to social investigation that would challenge the artificial borders between theory, research, and action. His conceptualization of PAR asserts participant knowledge as integral to validity, and democratic and participatory research as foundational to social change. PAR is part of a groundswell against the aggressive seizure of epistemic space wherein the lives and knowledges of colonized communities have served as “data plantations” (Ladson-Billings, 2003) for research done on their behalf. Hall (1975, 1981) highlights a common thread that runs through PAR's many iterations: an engagement

³¹ See, for example, Chambers, 2002; Fals-Borda, 1979, 1991; Gaventa, 1988; Gayfer, 1981, 1992; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, et al., 1993; Tandon, 2002; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 1997, 2001; Weis & Fine, 2004.

with three fundamental issues: (1) the meaningful and consequential participation of marginalized communities; (2) the production of critical knowledge through participatory inquiry; and (3) the implementation of social change for and by communities themselves. The interaction of these elements provides the ideological impetus behind a research process that empowers participants to transform their social reality by becoming critical participants in knowledge production, community development, and social change.

A participatory network comprised of autonomous centers in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin and North America (with increased interest shown by educators in the Caribbean and Arab regions) grew from the work of Hall and other researchers—among them women and Majority World researchers—who, like he, saw a schism between the philosophies of participatory education and development and the positivist research practices still prevalent in their fields (Bennett, 2004; Gayfer, 1981; Martin-Baro, 1994; Tandon, 2002). The principles of popular education and, in particular, the work of grassroots Latin American intellectuals Orlando Fals-Borda (1987, 1996) and Paulo Freire (1971, 1973, 1975) have also greatly influenced PAR's focus on critical consciousness, the democratization of knowledge production, anti-oppressive practice, and social justice.

Today, the influence of PAR extends to a broad spectrum of ideological, political, intellectual, and methodological streams applied in diverse international settings and disciplines and across academic and applied fields. These include, for example, participatory research in community development, action research in organizations, practitioner action research, rural participatory research, feminist action research, youth-centered PAR, and action research in education (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Herr & Anderson, 2005). Researchers have developed related iterations that fall under the broader banner of CBR, including collective action research (Leonard, 2002), research for development, and community action research (Reitsma-Street, 2002; Reitsma-Street

& Brown, 2003). Many of these streams have informed the development of my own FPAR praxis.

PAR Ideologies and Principles

Given its interdisciplinary, heterogeneous, and highly contextualized nature, it is impossible to reduce PAR to a single formula or fixed set of principles. PAR is better understood as a cyclical, emerging process whose underlying principles evolve from the discussions and debates that arise as it is enacted in specific contexts. PAR researchers nonetheless share deep concern with the ethics of conventional research practices in which researchers mine marginalized communities for knowledge without contributing to community development or social change. PAR processes subvert the role of the outside 'expert' researcher, thereby flattening the traditionally hierarchical researcher-researched relationship. In PAR, researchers and community members become co-investigators, pooling their expertise and cultural knowledge in a cogenerative process that ideally results in social action that is grounded in the needs of community members.

The definition and operationalization of PAR principles is a source of much debate within and outside the field. Nonetheless, PAR researchers have written extensively about commonalities within the PAR spectrum.³² Five features common to many PAR initiatives, described below, influenced the development of our research design.

i. PAR involves a collective process with a horizontal distribution of power.

PAR is explicitly politicized and eschews modernist claims to objectivity and value-free theorizing. PAR seeks to redefine the privileged relationship between researchers and knowledge production by positioning participants as agents at the center of their own process of knowledge generation. In contrast to traditional research relationships, PAR

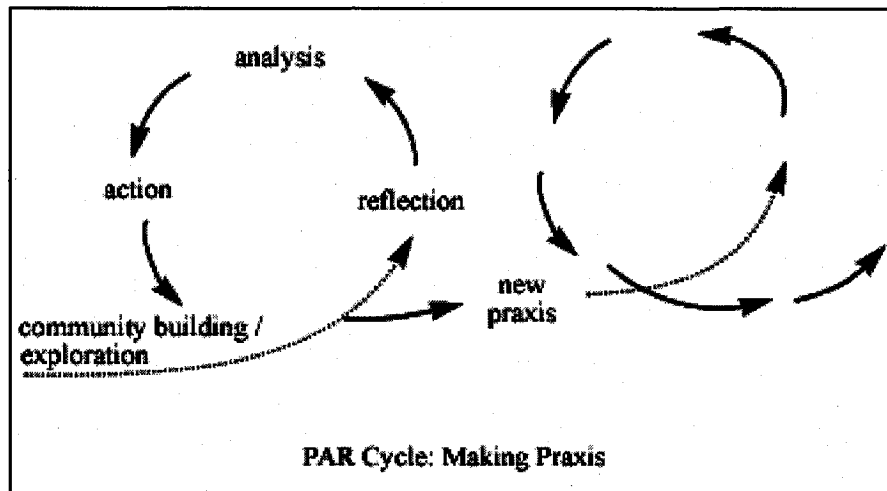
³² See Fals-Borda, 1996; Gayfer, 1981, 1992; Hall, 1975, 1981, 1993; Maguire, 1987, 2000; McTaggart, 1991, 1997; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993; Smith, Willms, & Johnson, 1997.

works toward a redistribution of resources and power, as reflected, for instance, in my use of the terms 'research team' and 'participant-researchers.'

ii. PAR must be grounded in the experiences and participation of the community. PAR is concerned with supporting local knowledge, working across borders of insider and outsider voices, and ensuring that research works 'with' rather than 'for' (Hall, 1973, 1978). Although PAR's organic and contextualized nature accounts for multiple potential pathways and iterations, in PAR the research originates with, and is owned by, the community. Ideally, participants should be involved with all stages of the research process, from the conceptualization of the research agenda and design, to the data collection and analysis, to the evaluation of outcomes, to their dissemination and potential implementation (Smith, Willms, & Johnson, 1997). The use of methodologies (e.g., theatre, mapping, narrative interviews, community surveys) that are culturally relevant, age appropriate, and embedded in participants' cultural contexts positions participants to articulate their own theories about issues they identify.

iii. The cyclical process of PAR generates new knowledge and praxis. PAR is deeply critical of linear thinking; it considers causality as circular or spiral in nature, with multiple determinants rather than singular, predictable antecedents (Fine et al., 2001). As illustrated in Figure 6.1, PAR evolves through a cycle of reflection, analysis, and action that recurs throughout the research process, allowing participants to draw increasingly complex implications for praxis and apply these to social action.

Figure 6.1 The PAR praxis-making cycle.



Praxis is a synthesis of practice and theory; it impedes exclusive academic claims to knowledge production by providing community members with tools to translate theoretical knowledge into concrete, 'on the ground' outcomes (Hall, 1993). To develop praxis, participants undertake many iterations of the PAR cycle. First, they develop their research partnership and establish common themes and goals. Then they describe and explore the problems they face. Coding, comparing, and linking, they slowly move from a micro- to a macroanalysis and, in the process, make theoretical sense of the challenges they have identified. At this stage, the goal is to peel back the covers to develop critical consciousness, a critical understanding of the underlying forces that shape those everyday issues typically rendered invisible by the status quo. Participants can then plan actions to unsettle the relations of ruling in which these conditions are embedded.

iv. PAR is emergent, fluid, context specific, and open ended. As the PAR cycle demonstrates, PAR sets in motion an iterative, open-ended, highly contextualized process that cannot be prescribed; consultation and ongoing participation are necessary to shape the goals and process of any given PAR project. The stages in a cycle of PAR are rarely sequential or distinct, and they may receive different emphasis according to the research

context. For example, our own project required an exploratory/community-building phase to set the stage for PAR.

v. PAR is focused on action and change. Concerned as it is with the relationship between research, knowledge production, social control, and social inequity, PAR aspires to move beyond the promotion of critical consciousness and new knowledge to the mobilization of social change for and by marginalized communities. In this respect, the success of PAR projects is typically contested and partial. While the PAR cycle promotes critical awareness of inequitable power relations, the actual transformation of social conditions is inevitably the greater—and the more elusive—challenge. The schism between ideologies of social change and their implementation highlights the gap that can occur between PAR's promise and its practice. In later chapters, I discuss how the research team in "It's About Us" acknowledged and struggled with this critical issue.

Analytical Strategies in PAR

The analytical methods and tools used in PAR originate from a variety of disciplines; common data collection and interpretation methods include surveys, case studies, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and creative methods such as video ethnography, among others. PAR researchers must be willing to engage with a diverse array of methodological tools, analytical methods, data collection techniques, and reporting strategies, and these must be contextually relevant and accessible to participant-researchers. In this context, reliability, trustworthiness, and authenticity are established through a double-pronged strategy. First, the analytical process is evaluated through persistent and rigorous member checking and triangulation; responsiveness to emerging questions and tensions; the adoption of a shared and active analytical stance; and methodological coherence. Second, the process and outcomes themselves are transparently evaluated, including the level, quality, and impact of participants'

engagement, and benefits to and effects on the community's capacity to address and act on identified social issues (Pretty & Chambers, 1995).

These measures, focusing as they do on both content and process, are intended to ensure that data interpretation is multifaceted and multitoolled, grounded in intersubjectivity, and shared transparently. Because PAR involves a transformational praxis, data analysis focuses not only on what is, but on "what is not ... and what ought to be" (Martin-Baro, 1994, p. 29). In stark contrast to positivist research, these qualities take precedence over the need to 'control' the research process, thus destabilizing hegemonic constructions of validity and scientific knowledge ownership.

While PAR often takes participants' personal experiences as a starting point, the research does not remain in the personal realm. PAR links these microexperiences to an evolving macroanalysis that typically, and importantly, involves critical reflection on the sociopolitical, economic, and historical contexts of social inequity. A truly community-based process cannot be prescribed or rushed without destroying the integrity of the research. Participants must be willing to trust the process and to negotiate compromises through sustained and meaningful power sharing. PAR is therefore both a highly challenging and rewarding methodology. It demands a tremendous commitment to process and partnership, a great deal of the research team's energy, time, and resources, an openness to ambiguity, and a willingness to be accountable to a range of expectations from community and academic partners.

Addressing the Gaps in PAR

When the research process fails to engage with structural and material barriers to full participation, abstract and potentially tokenistic notions of 'participation' and 'empowerment' become problematic when operationalized via PAR. Hall recognized early on the potentially manipulative role that third parties (e.g., funding and sponsoring

agencies or government officials, for example) can play in influencing research goals, processes, and outcomes:

It would be an error to assume that naive or uncontrolled use of participatory research results in strengthening the power of the powerless, for experience has shown that power [under PAR methods] can easily accrue in those already in control (Hall, 1981, in Bennet, 2004, p. 22).

In both Majority and Minority World contexts, many researchers have imposed an institutionally sanctioned model of PAR that does not necessarily represent Indigenous or minority models of knowledge production and community development, thus making research an imperialistic tool (Lykes, 2001b; Smith, 1999). In these cases, potentially manipulative or exploitative research partnerships are instituted under the tokenistic guise of the 'best interest' of communities. Ostensibly participatory community research projects, such as church-run family planning projects or corporate-funded AIDS research, actually impose and expand state agendas, procedures, and policies that serve to regulate marginalized groups (McTaggart, 1997). PAR then becomes a coercive instrument resulting in predetermined outcomes rather than in goals that are grounded in the needs of community (Bennet, 2004; Hall 1981; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1993).

Questions about collaboration and solidarity must also be raised. Many PAR projects are founded on the implicit assumption that privileged, educated, and predominantly White, male researchers can, through the equalizing tenets of PAR, uncritically operate in solidarity with a marginalized community. More problematically, researchers' roles, and the ways in which they benefit from the knowledge and funding produced, remain unquestioned, while few returns accrue to the marginalized women and girls who are the intended beneficiaries of the research.

'The Other' Researches Forward

These common dilemmas in PAR speak to some, but not all, of the complexities involved in our research. Ours involved a different power dynamic in that we as

university researchers were not part of a dominant White, Euro-Western group: We were simultaneously colonized subjects and privileged academics—insiders to the language and practices of research, yet hoping to use these tools to unsettle our shared subjectivities as members of Victoria’s minority and Indigenous communities. Our complex power and social locations placed us in overlapping, contradictory positions, both in the research project and in relation to the girls. Our methodological strategies for ‘naming ourselves’ on our own terms had paradoxical implications; often we reconstructed rigid racialized boundaries even as we sought to dismantle them. Here again, we found few resources to help us navigate the shifting dynamics of the categories we claimed, or spoke against, as means of researching forward. Projects that address girls’ gendered racialization and that might have offered much-needed insights are practically absent from the PAR literature. Although PAR is theoretically compatible with feminism, few feminist applications of PAR have been conducted with girls, and even fewer with girls of colour or Indigenous girls. In the next two sections, I elaborate on these gaps.

Feminist PAR

PAR researchers have contributed valuable feminist theory from across disciplines and research contexts, but many feminist researchers³³ express concern that questions related to the gendered nature of participation and knowledge production in PAR remain underexamined. They emphasize that the analytical frameworks employed in PAR often suffer from a lack of feminist analysis, which carries over into an exclusion of feminist practices in research designs and the research agenda (Jackson & Kassam, 2005; Naples, 2003). Maguire (2001) states that:

³³ See, for example, the work of Fine, 2005; Lykes, 2001a, 2001b; Maguire, 1987, 2001; Mikel-Brown, 2005; Naples, 2003; Parajuli & Enslin, 1990; Shartrand & Brabeck, 2001; Weis & Fine, 2004, 2005.

despite explosive growth, feminisms and feminists still struggle for a legitimate place in the participatory action research world. There remain projects, trainings, books, courses, conferences and people in PAR who continue to marginalize, even totally ignore feminist concerns such as gender, voice, multiple identities and interlocking oppressions, everyday experiences, and power (p. xviii).

Feminists claim that many theoretical frameworks popular within the PAR movement obscure or distort women's experiences; they are particularly concerned with the collusion between patriarchy and multiple forms of oppression within the dominant popular education and political economy frameworks of PAR.

PAR's roots in popular education movements, and, in particular, the work of Paulo Freire, contribute valuable strengths, but feminists argue that women are peripheral and misrepresented in Freire's work, and that much work inspired by his philosophy is male dominated. The predominance of patriarchal, Eurocentric language to describe PAR projects, particularly within international and community development initiatives, reflects the exclusion of feminist perspectives and concerns (Hall, 1981, 2000a; Maguire, 1987, 2001; McTaggart, 1991, 1997; Naples, 2003). The exclusion of girls and women from research has a material and a constitutional basis: Organizational structures such as community and government agencies are traditionally White- and male-dominated realms from which women of colour and, to an even greater extent, girls of colour, are excluded. Bowes (1996) stresses that such research partnerships seldom allocate control over decision making and resources to girls and women, rendering them unequal participants in the research process.

PAR also often draws on historical materialism and/or critical theory, with a focus on class struggle. These perspectives tend to be reductionist; they cannot account completely for the experiences of girls and women who remain excluded from formal economic structures. Because of their focus on community participation and community leadership, PAR projects sometimes ignore the private domains of women and girls, as

well as the underlying social and economic factors that have rendered the experiences of girls and women 'private' or 'unofficial' and therefore outside the realm of economic and community governance. As a result, girls and women are often covertly—and sometimes overtly—denied the opportunities and spaces to access research projects in which they could raise social consciousness about issues that matter to them. As Mosse (1994) argues, "women do not have the power necessary to represent personal concerns publicly and, by default, have to conform to the categories of concern given in advance" (p. 515).

While no definitive feminist research tenet exists, in general, feminist PAR (FPAR) researchers advocate more open dialogue about the theoretical frameworks, categories, and practices that are often taken for granted by PAR researchers. Although many PAR projects have demonstrated an uncritical acceptance of Eurocentric, patriarchal research technologies and the privileges associated with them, some notable and important exceptions exist. For example, feminists have highlighted the complexities of power dynamics and exploitation within research teams (Maguire, 2001); they advocate institutional procedures and research technologies that take into account the structural forces that shape who participates in research, and in what capacity, as well as the meaning behind gaps and silences in research.³⁴ Several interdisciplinary initiatives have highlighted feminist concerns and developed feminist iterations of action research, including the Cornell Participatory Action Research Network's PARfem network (www.einaudi.cornell.edu/parfem), a resource site inaugurated in 2003 to explore connections between feminism and PAR.

Other PAR-influenced researchers have addressed the conundrum of participation by developing research models that straightforwardly acknowledge the elusiveness of building fully participatory academic-community partnerships involving women and

³⁴ Brydon-Miller, Maguire, & McIntyre, 2004; Fine et al., 2001; Hall, 1981, 2000a; Maguire, 2001; Mosse, 1994; Reason & Bradbury, 2000; Weis & Fine, 2004, 2005.

girls. For instance, Reitsma-Street (2002), who has been involved in several CBR projects with women and girls, has developed a model for community action research (CAR) that provides a framework for action-oriented CBR partnerships, without making claims of comprehensive or sustainable participation by community members.

In brief, feminists have initiated many important debates about representation, access, and power in PAR. Suffering as it does from its own limitations, however, feminist research cannot definitively settle these debates. Even within FPAR, involvement of the most invisible members of the population, such as girls or Indigenous women, is peripheral (Bennet, 2004; Bowes, 1996; Brown & Tandon, 1983; Narayanan, 2004, Weis & Fine, 2005). In FPAR, too, unsubstantiated generalizations about research projects assume that benefits reaped by White women are shared by girls and women of colour (Naples, 2003). As I demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, many of the most prominent contemporary feminist critiques continue to ignore that a focus on women's subjective selves as universally diverse and therefore 'equal' misrepresents the diversity of girls' and women's experiences.

Transnational feminists argue instead that identity intersections of race, class, sexuality, gender, citizenship, religion, ability, and so on, not only are socially produced, but are themselves socially constitutive, with real, but different, impacts on women's material lives. Relations of ruling—the scattered hegemonies described in Chapter 4—operate discursively in the lives of girls and women to produce a plethora of concerns, varying levels of access to knowledge production, and diverse approaches and needs in relation to social justice—none of which are naturally aligned or unproblematically comparable. In the ongoing debates about and within feminisms, the unique social locations and voices of racialized minority girls must be carefully considered and integrated in the development and application of research designs and methodologies.

Supporting Girls' Participation in PAR

When we consider discourses and impacts of age formation on constructions and experiences of girlhood, the complexities of incorporating a gendered analysis into our theorization and applications of PAR multiply. While FPAR suffers from a gap in conceptualizing the effects of age in shaping a gendered experience—and thus girls' roles in research—youth-centered PAR erases gender. This makes it difficult to extricate concerns about minority girls' vulnerabilities within PAR and FPAR.

Because of its strong roots in adult education, participatory research, including FPAR, has historically focused on adults. The prevalence of adult-based research, education, and development programs in PAR has obscured the needs and realities of children, youth, and, more specifically, girls (Berg & Owens, 2000; Berg, Owens, & Schensul, 2002; Golombek, 2002; Woollcombe, 1985). In these programs, young people are often unconsciously assumed to be 'products' whereas adults are producers of goods, holders of knowledge, owners of land and resources, and political and religious leaders (Golombek, 2002). Children and youth have been seen as secondary *de facto* beneficiaries of effective adult education and community research, rather than as central, decision-making participants. In these contexts, the rhetoric of participation can become tokenistic and superficial, rather than consequential and sustainable.

Nonetheless, 'youth participation' has become an important policy focus, resulting in a proliferation of PAR projects involving youth-adult partnerships. These initiatives aim to teach young people how to engage PAR principles and practices to document and intervene into social issues of concern in their lives.³⁵ However, multiple barriers impede the implementation of these partnerships, and participants frequently debate the extent to which PAR methods and practices that involve youth are wholly

³⁵ See for example Berg, Owens, & Schensul, 2002; Morgan, Pacheco, Rodriguez, et al., 2004; Sydio, Schensul, Owens, et al., 2000.

participatory or collaborative. In many research projects that tout a participatory approach, homogeneous notions of 'youth participation' and 'youth leadership' obscure age, gendered, classed, and racialized dynamics that structure access to, and outcomes of, participation.

These issues take on particular importance in relation to girls' participation in PAR. Research seldom conceptualizes girls as citizens and full participants in any process. Typically, girls are defined in terms of their parents'—particularly their fathers'—relationships to the economic world; the father's means of production is seen to define daily life for the family, even though a girl may not have access to the privileges associated with her family's official economic status (Weis & Fine, 2005). Several additional factors constrain girls' meaningful participation in PAR. Their everyday lives are less accessible than those of adults, and their decision making and personal commitments are likely to be directed by adults. Legal and social issues about informed consent, full participation, and access to funding and research resources compound these barriers.

Some girls are more marginalized from knowledge production than others. Minority girls' access to research is inequitable not only because of intersecting barriers of age and gender, but also due to markers of difference such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, citizenship, class, and so on. Girl-centered PAR projects that conceive of girlhood as homogenous fail to contribute a critical analysis of the influence of these intersections in shaping girls' practices of engagement and resistance. Minority girls are rarely granted real ownership in developing research theory and practice. Even when they are involved in research, their participation may be neither meaningful nor influential (Woollcombe, 1985). Such studies raise concerns that government-sponsored CBR will co-opt and tokenize minority girls to satisfy institutional policies about youth civic involvement. The danger here is that minority girls may be manipulated into participating

in programs that do little more than implement government policy, as well as in institutional hierarchies that may not serve their interests and concerns (Hagey, 1997; McTaggart, 1997). I return here to a point emphasized in Chapter 4: When minority girls are not involved in naming their own research problems and questions, research outcomes almost invariably ignore their realities, resulting in important gaps in theories, policies, and programming.

Conclusion

Blindness to the concerns of minority girls is reflected in the lack of attention to barriers to their participation in research projects, unequal access to projects, and prevalence of projects that exploit their knowledge or labour, but from which they garner few benefits (Fine, 2005; Fine et al., 2001; Jackson & Kassam, 2005; McTaggart, 1997; Narayanan, 2004). PAR concepts and terminologies become entwined in exploitative research practices when oft-used concepts such as ‘oppressed,’ ‘leadership,’ ‘voice,’ and ‘community’ collapse important hierarchies of gender, race, class, age, citizenship, and ability. The presumed homogeneity of a community minimizes the power differences that exist within any group and limits opportunities to explore how PAR itself can reproduce lines of power and exclusion in communities. FPAR researchers must seriously consider critical questions about the degree, quality, and nature of participation in FPAR—who has power and shares it, who becomes empowered and how, and what concrete outcomes stem from these processes. Given that economic and political power typically flow outside of minority girls and women’s realms of influence, it is important to consider to what extent they can become empowered by a research process—and to what extent empowerment can transform structural and material conditions. For racialized minority girls to be truly involved in FPAR, they must be directly involved in translating their experiences into meaningful knowledge—inside and outside academic contexts—with

concrete implications for multiple levels of change, from solidarity, community building and innovative counter-storytelling, to policy and institutional change. These are methodological issues I carefully consider in my findings chapters in order to harness their potential to facilitate, support, and reinforce TE. These complexities reemphasize the value of a transdisciplinary model of TE that extricates the difficulties of translating adult-centered feminist methodologies into girl-centered research.

CHAPTER 7:
WORKING THE GAPS: METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES IN POPULAR
THEATRE

No single history or unified set of explanatory concepts provides a mutually agreed upon definition or practice of popular theatre (PT). The research team in “It’s About Us” was drawn to its diverse methodological applications because, like PAR, PT is rooted in popular education, community development, and social change movements. PT seemed well suited to meeting the girls’ identified need for voice, self-representation, and advocacy. Given their common origins, it is not surprising that many of PAR’s strengths—and gaps—are reproduced in PT. Our experience with PT reemphasized that creative, participatory, action-based methodologies are not inherently feminist or girl-centered, and, as such, they did not automatically align with the principles of our research. Here again, our team had to engage in a process of conceptual and methodological translation to contextualize PT to our research goals and team.

Facilitating Popular Theatre

Given my roles as project coordinator and theatre facilitator, I was firmly grounded in the aspects of our research design that related to PT. In my diverse previous encounters with PT as an activist, youth practitioner, and researcher, I had found it particularly suited to working with girls because it encourages processes of critical self-reflection, relationship building, peer support, and community building—all hallmarks of effective participatory, feminist-based, and action-oriented research and practice. Because of my multiple cultural locations, I have drawn on many diverse traditions in

applied and popular theatre.³⁶ In the following sections of this chapter, I explore these threads and their application to a research methodology.

Theatre and Knowledge: Our Selves on Stage

As a narrative dialogic performative text, drama is an ontological strategy well suited to linking collective self-representation to a structural analysis. The word *theatre*, from the Greek *theatron*, is cognate with *theorem* (a way to make theory). The roots *theasta*, *theorein*, and *theorema* mean, respectively, *to see*, *to view*, and *to gaze*. Because theatre is a strategy for naming, an arena in which to make real by showing, it is also a means to uncover what has been rendered invisible: “Through the performance process itself, what is normally sealed up, inaccessible to everyday observation and reasoning, in the depth of socio-cultural life, is drawn forth” (Turner, 1982, p. 13). PT is essentially an action-based form of inquiry in a liminal space, well suited to a postcolonial research praxis that seeks to disrupt the process of ‘being spoken’ or ‘being made’ through dominant discourses, policies, and institutional practices. We thought its inherently relational and collective nature would provide a constructive space within which to honour the girls’ embodied knowledges, impart concrete skills, and respond to their request for safe spaces ‘just for them’ in which to heal, rejuvenate, and build solidarity.

³⁶ These include narrative therapy (Epston & Henwood, 1994; White & Epston, 1990); drama therapy (Jennings, 1994; Landy, 1986; Meldrum, 1994); psychodrama (Moreno, 1972); sociodrama (Holderness, 1992); ethnodrama (Mienczakowski, 1995, 1997, 2001); Playback Theatre (Feldhendler, 1994, 2004); Theatre for Conscientization (Freire, 1973; 1975); Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979, 1990, 1992, 1998a, 1998b; Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994); theatre in education (Gallagher, 2001, 2002; O’Toole, 1976); theatre for development (Kidd, 1984; Prentki, 2002); political, community-based and anti-racism popular theatres (Bates, 1996; Colleran & Spencer, 1998; Farrow, 1993; Ferrand, 1995; Kershaw, 1999; Prentki & Selman, 2000; Salverson, 1996; Schecter, 2003; Shepard, 1995); feminist applied theatres (Allison, 1994; Butterwick & Selman, 2003; Sistren, 1992; Wandor, 1986); and applied theatres with and by young people (Cloutier, 1997; Fatkin, 1989; Howarth, 1994; Lam et al., 2002; Little, 1999; Seebaran & Johnston, 1998).

Drama as a Healing Methodology

In this chapter, I focus mainly on popular theatres, which fall under the large umbrella of applied theatres. Not all applied theatres are participatory or popular, but applied theatres typically yield beneficial therapeutic outcomes which have greatly influenced the ways in which theatre is used in schools, social service programs, and community organizations (Linden, n.d.; Taylor, 2003). Applied theatre is a methodology “of movement, of exploration, of hope, of healing; it transforms and inspires, it calls you in, it nurtures you and gives you voice” (Linden, n.d., p. 8). As a therapeutic approach—for instance, as a tool to explore children’s and youth’s experiences of abuse, foster care, special needs, disability, poverty, or substance use—applied theatre draws on narrative therapy, drama therapy, psychodrama, and theatre for education. Community service providers, therapists, youth workers, teachers, activists, and community groups have used therapeutic and educational applications of theatre with much success to provide a process for transformation, healing, education, and skill building (Bolton, 1986 1989; Cloutier, 1997).

In her drama-based work with immigrant high school girls, Gallagher (2001, 2002) found that drama imparted cumulative transferable skills, including relational skills involving collaboration, conflict resolution, and group building; communication skills such as reading, verbal and dramatic expression, and public speaking; analytical and critical thinking skills, including analysis of assumptions and stereotypes and exposure to a multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations; and finally, personal and self-expression skills, including a sense of voice and empowerment. Her findings illustrate the concrete methodological benefits offered by applied theatre in comparison to less expressive methodologies. These benefits include positive social, developmental, and educational outcomes and the capacity for creative, engaged, strength-based inquiry.

Popular Theatres and Social Change

While the therapeutic, skill building, and personal development outcomes of applied theatres are valuable—and are a noted benefit of “It’s About Us”—it is important to highlight certain gaps in the scope of their applications. When used for skill building or as a therapeutic intervention, applied theatres may address individual circumstances without adequately exposing underlying social structures. Because they are directed by a theatre expert rather than by participants, and as such are often embedded in educational and social service systems, these applications may be overly institutionalized, limiting opportunities for organic, grassroots social action.

In contrast, our research goals called for a more critical methodology that would engage us in forging links between daily struggles and macro issues, and would interrogate systemic and institutionalized social practices. We relied not only on drama’s nurturing, ameliorative benefits, but also on its subversive nature, its ability to tear down, expose, and deconstruct (Bird & Nyman, 1993). Thus, we turned to a more politicized form of applied theatre, popular theatre (PT). Popular theatres—and, specifically, Theatre of the Oppressed—are action-centered, popular forms of applied theatre. Popular theatres trouble the cultural schism between *the Theatre*—formal literary productions which traditionally have been the exclusive social domain of the nobility and aristocracy—and *theatre*—popular iterations of theatre which have been used across the world for public entertainment, cultural development, communication, and education.³⁷ Like PAR, PT is informed by the popular education cycle of reflection, analysis, action, and praxis that works toward a deepened critical consciousness, mobilization, and social action.³⁸

³⁷ PT principles and techniques were inspired in part by the Brechtian dramaturgy of the 1920s and 1930s in Germany, which used theatre as the medium for a materialist critique, undermining the notion of theatre as an elite, upper-class institution (Cloutier, 1997; Epskamp, 1989).

³⁸ For international applications of PT, see, for example, Bjorkman & Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1998; Farrow, 1993; Ferrand, 1995; Little, 1999; Schechter, 2003; Shutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994.

Through drama, PT makes manifest the links between people's daily struggles and their material, historical, institutional, social, political, and economic conditions.

It must be noted that some applications of PT are emancipatory, educational, and transformational, but are not participatory. If the theatre project is led by an outside facilitator, trainer, teacher, or director, there may be no comprehensive participatory process built in, nor a systematic focus on a feminist or decolonizing analysis, girl-centered process, or social change. Conversely, although most participatory theatres have educational or developmental goals, not all are politicized or transformative. They can also be manipulated to serve interests that are incompatible with the needs and realities of racialized minority and Indigenous girls and women.

The Contested History of Popular Theatre

As global movements for social justice have gradually politicized popular theatres, PT practitioners have moved beyond the narrow bounds of performance and playwriting to become facilitators, activists, and advocates.³⁹ During the 1930s to 1970s, PT gradually evolved into a site of anti-colonial struggle. In Latin America, Asia, and Africa, PT gained momentum as students, workers, and peasants used it as a tool against class oppression, landlessness, unemployment, poverty, and Western imperialism (Kidd & Rashid, 1984). PT's development in Canada was influenced by the workers' theatre movement. As in other parts of the world, this movement focused on issues of class equity, economic reform, and anti-imperialism (Cloutier, 1997).

Many of PT's numerous well-known currents or iterations are informed by the ideologies and techniques of Freire's Theatre for Conscientization (Freire, 1970, 1973), and, most notably, Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). In the past 20 years, community-based PT companies have proliferated; in these milieux, PT companies and

³⁹ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully explore PT's multiple histories; my overview focuses on its applications to working with minority girls.

community members partner to promote educational campaigns and to foster community engagement in local development. For example, in Playback Theatre (Feldhendler, 1994, 2004) and in socio- and ethnodramas (Holderness, 1992; Mienczakowski, 1995, 2001), professional actors work with community members to create plays based on their everyday realities, thereby galvanizing support for various community development initiatives. These productions are typically performed in community halls and centers that are accessible to community members. They focus on salient local issues such as drug use, domestic violence, environmental education, or homelessness. Performances serve as catalysts for discussion and action, for instance, lobbying local government, advocating policy change, or developing community services (Filewood, 1987; Holderness, 1992). More explicitly politicized veins of community PT include theatre for agitation, street theatre, and legislative theatre (Boal, 1990; Ferrand, 1995; Kershaw, 1999). Political and satirical theatres have been used to demystify socioeconomic and political struggles and to politicize the public through the use of various media. For example, anti-globalization and peace protesters have used guerrilla street theatre, puppetry, and political satire as means of demonstration (Salverson, 1996; Schechter, 2003).

Although marginalized within the full spectrum of dramatic traditions, in the field itself, PT's increased popularization and politicization have generated myriad international applications with a host of practices and varied levels of participation, from students or development workers performing moralistic, formative, or educational plays, to outside researchers and professional actors creating open-ended dramas in partnership with community members, to communities developing their own plays to raise political consciousness and mobilize for social change. Few theatres, though, have been adapted and applied as prominently as Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.

Theatre of the Oppressed

Augusto Boal (1979, 1990, 1992, 1998a, 1998b), a Brazilian activist, dramatist, and popular educator, is one of the world's most prolific and influential PT practitioners. *Theatre of the Oppressed*, first published in 1974,⁴⁰ established Boal as one of the grandfathers of PT; many of the theatre initiatives described in this chapter were strongly influenced by his work. In common with other PT practitioners, Boal developed an explicitly critical theatre method to counter the "culture of silence" (Freire, 1987, p. 13) in which oppressed communities are often submerged. Steeped in grassroots Latin American popular education ideologies and drawing on the Freirian methodologies of codification and conscientization, Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) uses drama-based techniques to engage groups in developing critical consciousness about social issues, communicate shared concerns to audiences, and promote community advocacy and social change (Conrad, 2005; Kidd, 1984a, 1984b; Prentki, 2002). By transforming didactic forms of theatre into interactive tools, Boal has developed several theatrical techniques to develop drama-based forms of activism, codify social hegemony, and publicly expose the structural inequities of social reality.

Typically, TO evolves in four phases: (1) group building/exploration of experiences; (2) development of stories for performance; (3) performance and audience participation; and (4) evaluation/implementation. Each phase incorporates cycles of inquiry, interpretation, and dissemination, and each has its own particular tools, outcomes, and considerations. In "It's About Us," though we articulated different objectives for each phase, in keeping with Boal's techniques, we incorporated theatre games and exercises at all stages. In subsequent chapters, I demonstrate that each phase of TO involves unique challenges and practices that facilitate girls' TE in particular ways.

⁴⁰ Other widely translated and circulated Boal works include *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992) and *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995).

Popular Theatre as a Research Methodology

PT is not specifically a research methodology, but it is uniquely suited to community-based action research. Although it is sometimes characterized as a 'lightweight' or uncritical approach to inquiry (Butterwick, 2003), I have found it to be disciplined and rigorous. Its ability to decenter and unsettle, to create spontaneous creative spaces, to play, to challenge, and to symbolize held great promise for engaging the girls with the research themes while nurturing their strategies of self-representation and emerging social advocacy. In our sessions, we employed Boal techniques drawn from image, forum, and legislative theatres. These techniques enabled "decoding and rendering accessible the culturally specific signs, symbols, aesthetics, behaviors, language and experiences" of social systems and practices (Mienczakowski, 2001, p. 468).

We complemented TO with a range of other established traditions from PT and popular education, as well as approaches developed or suggested by the girls. We looked to researchers from diverse fields who have translated drama's expressive and participatory qualities into vehicles for transformative inquiry and methodology. For example, Mienczakowski (1998, 2001) has used ethnodrama (a form of ethnographic dramatic narrative) for emancipatory social analysis, using theatre to code and analyze oppressive social practices. In their PT research project with feminist activists, Butterwick and Selman (2003) employed theatre as a dialogical strategy for collective interviewing, interpretation, and feminist advocacy. O'Toole and Burton (2002) used school-based theatre as part of an action research project for conflict management training in rural Australian schools, and O'Connor (2000) applied PT as a praxis for social change research with young offenders in Britain. Gallagher (2001b, 2002) used theatre in education to explore girls' sense of voice and belonging in school, involving older girls as mentors and co-researchers. As we did in "It's About Us," the girls in her project documented their process with field notes, questionnaires, journals, audience

reports, peer-to-peer interviews, and videotaped sessions of their reflections, both in and out of role.

Critique of Popular Theatre

As with PAR, PT requires a critical analysis that challenges participants and audiences to question the social, political, and economic conditions that underlie the stories presented. Otherwise, PT remains a surface methodology, another form of storytelling that reifies the girls as objects of study and consumption. Keeping this pitfall in mind, we searched for PT applications in feminist, Indigenous, and anti-racism projects that offered critical girl-centered strategies. We found few examples. While many projects have employed drama-based inquiry, the use of PT in feminist research and practice with and by girls, particularly girls of colour, is relatively new and has received little theoretical and applied treatment. As seen in the discussion of PAR, this gap stems partially from attempts to adapt adult education methods to applied practice with and by girls. Girl-centered applications of PT require facilitative and analytical tools that take into account girls' particular social locations, as well as the nature and level of their engagement with self-inquiry and leadership. We continuously evaluated which applications would help to sharpen our analysis of interlocking social formations and move us beyond one-dimensional representations of girls' lives. In the end, we had to draw on various threads and histories to collate a hybrid PT methodology, which we infused with transnational feminist and postcolonial theories.

The transformative power of PT is made manifest only through its analytical lens. Without comprehensive analytical strategies that expose historical lines of power, PT can further entrench silences and reinstate itself as a colonizing research tool. Just as in PAR, PT practitioners have to contend with the increasing institutionalization of their strategies of resistance, particularly through projects that are linked to international development (Manyozo, 2002; Prentki, 2002). This is a concern across the spectrum of PT. Etherton

(2004) and Kidd and Rashid (1984) contend that PT principles are frequently appropriated by NGOs, aid agencies, and religious organizations to promote policy agendas around rural development, modernization, health education, and resource management—purposes that are far removed from mobilization and social justice advocacy. The insertion of neoconservative international development policies, for instance, to ensure compliance with family planning, can seriously compromise efforts toward radical social change by feminist and anti-colonial community-based activists, particularly girls. For instance, Plastow (2002) describes the struggles of the Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatre, which has been debilitated by:

growing difficulties posed by state censorship, the enormous problems experienced by women in Zimbabwean theatre, the pressures and compromises induced by the need for groups to earn money, and the fact that many plays are propagandistic (p. 207).

Limitations related to funding, scope and depth of analysis, structural constraints, and sustainability suggest important considerations for “It’s About Us.” All iterations of PT hold critical tensions about voice and participation (who gets to participate, whose perspective is incorporated), what sort of analysis is superimposed onto the dramatic process, and who controls and implements recommendations for community development and social change. To avoid further exploiting and censoring girls, PT must incorporate an analysis of the aged, gendered, classed, and racialized lines of power that exist within any community and provide strategic alternatives for change.

Yet, like PAR, PT suffers limitations in its attention to the intersecting effects of race and gender. Many prominent practitioners of PT, including Boal, are privileged and educated male practitioners whose language, practices, and principles tend to erase the realities of women and girls of colour. Feminist practitioners have been critical of PT’s patriarchal roots, which they argue limit opportunities for women and girls to participate fully and to center their concerns in sufficiently complex ways (Fisher, 1994). Rare but

helpful examples exist of feminist applied and popular theatres that have developed strategies for centering feminist concerns in their productions.⁴¹ For instance, Butterwick and Selman (2003) have developed a feminist PT research methodology as a creative approach to analyze, name, and organize around issues of power, silencing, and exclusion in feminist coalitions. Womanspace Theatre (Gillespie, 1978) in the U.S. and Sistren Theatre in Jamaica have drawn on storytelling to insert a structural critique of social power into their theatre methodologies. Sistren Theatre, Green (2004) writes, “strives to use theatre to expose experiences which had been perceived as private and individual—domestic violence, teen pregnancy, poverty—as connected to the historical, social, and political conditions facing Jamaican women” (p. 477).

Nonetheless, feminist PT practitioners, while sensitive to issues related to gender, class, and sexuality, often overlook and undertheorize age-related barriers. Women’s concerns may be automatically extended to girls, and benefits to women are assumed to flow to girls as well (Jowett, 2004). Projects which focus on girls’ participation also fail to take into account their diverse social locations, providing us with few concrete examples to draw from in developing our own PT methodology. As I discuss in my presentation of findings, we had to work very hard to build a PT methodology in this context of multiple erasures of the intersectionalities of gender, race, age, class, nationality, language, sexuality, and ability.

Conclusion

The dilemmas highlighted in Chapters 6 and 7 underscore the asymmetrical correlation between theories and practices of research for social change. Compared with more traditional methods that clearly delineate research roles and boundaries, these

⁴¹ For examples, see Allison, 1994; Butterwick, 2003; Butterwick & Selman, 2003; Chalk, 2002; Gillespie, 1978; Sistren, 2002; Wandor, 1986.

methodologies typically provide much deeper, and therefore messier, entry points into relationships, engagement, action, and transformation. In much of the literature on participatory transformative research, this ‘messiness’ is often taken for granted or glossed over. Participatory researchers rightly want to celebrate their successes, but often are reluctant to make salient the struggles they face in implementing their methodologies. Desire to bolster communities and to make participatory claims conflicts with the need to make visible our own collusion with dynamics of power in the practice of social research.

Despite the gaps and challenges, the overarching principles of PAR and PT—meaningful participation of marginalized groups, critical consciousness around social problems, and community-driven social change—all provide a forum within which the enabling conditions for TE can be nurtured and its praxis strengthened and intensified. In subsequent chapters, I elaborate on those challenges and discuss how we addressed these gaps by creating decolonizing FPAR practices that can engender and sustain TE.

CHAPTER 8:
WEAVING KNOWLEDGE THREADS: DILEMMAS IN DATA
INTERPRETATION

Thus far, in putting forth a transdisciplinary model of transformative engagement (TE), I have charted the relationships among minority girls' identity formation and engagement in contexts of social exclusion; Indigenous, postcolonial, and transnational feminist perspectives on social change; girlhood and applied youth work perspectives on minority girls; my research themes, design, methodology, and conceptual framework; and the promising if imperfect approaches of FPAR and PT as methods to promote girls' TE.

In this chapter I apply my discussion of FPAR to dilemmas in data interpretation. The collaborative and often public nature of expressive, participatory methodologies requires an array of interpretive mechanisms to engage with multiple layers of data and with ethical and conceptual issues of interpretation and knowledge production. While they are deeply concerned with detailing the process and implications of research, however, these methodologies lack clearly established analytical procedures; what counts as data (e.g., process, stories, analytical conversations, scripts) is varied and context specific. To address this gap, I devised a tool for data interpretation, an Interpretive Spiral Model (ISM), that is compatible with the design and principles of my research. After first outlining our research team's data sources and discussing some theoretical and practical dilemmas in interpretation, I describe the application of this fluid, multimethod analytical tool to data interpretation in participatory research.

Research Documentation

The methodological design of "It's About Us" allowed for continuous data generation, gathering, interpretation, and theorizing through interactive, collaborative processes. Our project yielded two data categories: content and procedural. Content or

thematic data reflect the initial project themes, in this case, racialized minority girls' experiences of identity formation and social belonging in predominantly White spaces. We also gathered procedural data, including reflections about the effectiveness of the research design and the implementation of FPAR and PT.

Our data collection and interpretation were built directly into our processes of FPAR and PT. We used PT specifically to generate, document, and interpret our *content* data. We combined PT with other creative and participatory multimedia tools such as journaling, art, and photovoice, sometimes in combination (e.g., drama and art; photography and journals). In addition, we used the following methods to document our *procedural* data: ethnographic observations and field notes; written focus group and anonymous group evaluations; written, videotaped, and audiotaped reflections from participants and researchers; journal entries; research 'products'; and documented evidence of research outcomes, such as the formation of Anti-dote, whose mandate and goals reflect the findings of the collective data interpretation generated by the PT project. The research 'products' include a series of four skits and their accompanying introductions and full scripts; a photodrama project with photographs and scripts; a series of images by artist Eva Campbell; transcripts from conference and community presentations; and a draft handbook on FPAR with minority girls, not yet published.

Several well-documented youth- and girl-centered PAR projects provide rationale for employing diverse media to develop strategies for resistance and advocacy. For example, children in Lahore and Nepal used video projections of street life as a backdrop to their theatre production about street children, which they used to lobby local government (Etherton, 2004). Turner (1982) documented a Zimbabwean project where children transformed art and natural materials such as stones and sand to map a project for child-focused social change in their communities. Mayan women and children who were survivors of war engaged photovoice to promote healing and self-representation,

and to counter essentialized journalistic and touristic representations of Indigenous peoples (Lykes, 2001a, 2001b). As with PT, these methods provide tools to develop critical consciousness and strategies of resistance, to build or rebuild community through collective action, and to name and document experiences that have been submerged under dominant discourses and practices.

Our diverse interactive and creative data collection measures were suited to the breadth of roles we took on in collecting data and creating the drama pieces. For example, while we operated as a research team, we were not all similarly involved in the creative dramatic process itself. Only the girls acted in the skits, while the women assisted with the analysis and documentation. As a result, the girls' and the women's reflections on the drama process came from very different places. The girls' reflections were located in their experiences of becoming actors; the women, who were outside of the acting process, became temporary 'insiders' through participant observation, collective analysis, and facilitation. As the theatre facilitator, I inhabited an inside-outside position, facilitating different kinds of analytical procedures to incorporate the women's 'outside' reflections about the girls' ongoing analysis as actors. As such, I became a medium for enquiries about the relationship between experiences observed by the women, including myself, and the ways in which the girls analyzed these situations.

Explanation of Data Sources

For the purposes of my analysis of TE, which was not an original theme of the study but arose out of my own subsequent interpretation of the data, I employed additional data sources that were not systematically and collectively reviewed and interpreted by all members of the research team. Below I identify the data sources which were reviewed and interpreted by the research team as well as 'new' data interpreted for the purpose of this dissertation.

5. **Research team data sources** (data co-created by the research team and shared with and/or interpreted by team members):

- videotapes of all theatre sessions and presentations
- transcripts of the scripts of the storylines and skits developed
- videotaped and/or transcribed conference presentations
- copies of written and taped group and anonymous evaluations
- written collaborative research abstracts, conference papers, and reports
- photographs and drawings by and of the participants and accompanying scripts written by the girls
- transcripts of interviews with the girls' advisory committee, which included girls from the research team and other girls

6. **Data sources interpreted for the purpose of this dissertation** (data that may or may not have been co-created by the research team participants, and which have not been systematically shared and/or interpreted by all participants):

- transcripts of audiotaped evaluation and debrief sessions
- field and journal notes from the girls
- my field notes and research observations
- administrative documentation, such as project planning outlines and team e-mails
- other supporting documentation, such as reference letters and consent forms
- Anti-dote documentation (mandate, pamphlets, posters, organizational documentation, etc.) produced after the end of the research project

The PAR Praxis-Making Cycle

Hall (1975, 1991), Martin-Baro (1994), Tandon (2002), and Vio Grossi (1981) have been instrumental in theorizing approaches to the implementation of the reflection-analysis-action-praxis cycle in PAR. Drawing on this work, I outline below how our application of the praxis-making spiral process (as described in Chapter 5) carried us through a series of exploratory, analytical, and action-focused steps that enabled the ongoing interpretation of both our content and procedural data.

i. Community development and problem identification. Our initial research problematic originated from the community of racialized girls and young women who participated in the focus groups in Phase 1 of the larger study. We used PT and other expressive methods to refine and elaborate these initial themes and draw out the strategies the girls used to navigate the identified problematics.

ii. Development of critical consciousness. We engaged in a process of identification and problematization of the girls' individual experiences. Over time, using PT to develop critical analysis, the girls began to link their individual experiences to the broader context, thereby promoting critical consciousness and collective education about the systemic or structural nature of their personal experiences.

iii. Identification of concrete strategies for change. At this stage, the girls developed their own theories and solutions to identified problems (Hall, 1975), thus moving beyond knowledge generation to concrete social transformation and praxis making. Taking on the roles of advocates and activists, they selected projects and decided on actions: a conference, public lectures, workshops, and participation in the creation of a community organization.

Figure 8.1 illustrates our PAR cycle of data gathering and implementation of findings. Below it, in Table 8.1, I summarize the praxis-making cycle.

Figure 8.1 The PAR praxis-making cycle.

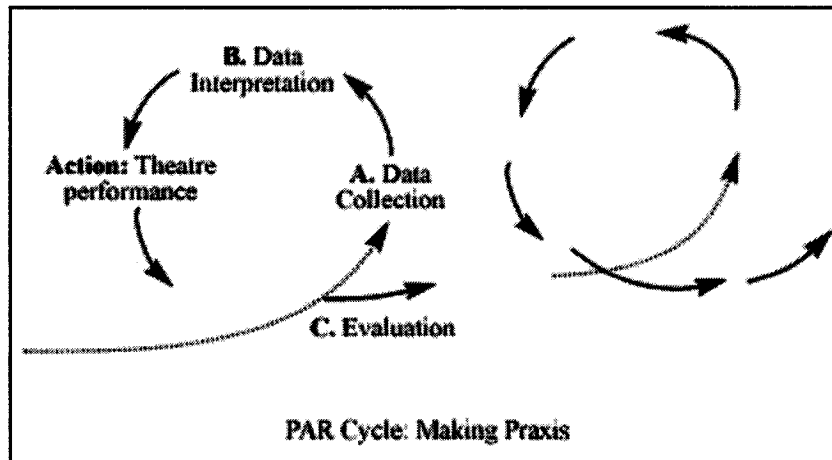


Table 8.1 Summarized breakdown of the praxis-making cycle.

Data collection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PT and other expressive methods were used as a primary method for collecting and interpreting data. ● Data was captured in the theatre development phase in the form of skits and a photovoice project, as well as in the performance phase in the form of audience involvement and feedback. ● Procedural data was captured by text about the theatre process (ongoing reflexive process captured in journals, field notes, evaluations, scripts, etc.).
<p>Data interpretation and methods for triangulation Data was continuously generated and interpreted through an iterative PAR spiral (exploration, reflection, action, praxis) in two phases, described below.</p>
<p>a. Theatre development phase</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Theatre was used to explore and refine themes generated during the focus group phase and to suggest new ones. ● Participants explored their own lived experiences in relation to the themes. ● A collective dialectic process was created through theatre. ● Reflection-Analysis-Action-Praxis spiral was ongoing.
<p>b. Performance phase</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Findings were interpreted and tested for congruence by a public audience of peers and other practitioners and academics who acted as an interpretive community, which highlighted tensions, agreements, congruencies, and discrepancies.
Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PAR process was completed and evaluated. ● Group reflected on process, goals, outcomes, implications for action, and potential for community development.

Data Interpretation

The iterative nature of PAR incorporates a multiplicity of processes and contributions that lead to a wide array of possible data, actions, and interpretations (Creswell, 2002; Gaventa, 1988; Leonard, 2002). In analyzing my data to conceptualize the notion of TE, I drew on rich data from a variety of sources, all of which combine to establish an 'audit trail' of our collective interpretive process and provide the basis for a multilayered analysis. In this dissertation, I focus primarily on procedural data, such as methodological field notes and team members' observations on the research process itself. These procedural data reveal important insights into the challenges and benefits of our design and methodological approaches, helping to illuminate the different dimensions of TE. I rely on the content-focused data only as a secondary source to frame my analysis of racialized minority girls' realities and to demonstrate both gaps in current research and the need for new approaches to inquiry with and by racialized minority girls.

Before describing my data interpretation model in further detail, I first consider some key interpretive dilemmas that feminist researchers might face in using research as a practice of social change across disciplinary and identity borders.

Finding Interpretive Voice in Collaborative Research

As a participant-researcher I am accountable not only to my own interpretation as researcher, writer, student, and participant, but also to the interpretations of other team members, of our audiences, and of the community members with whom we worked (Hagey, 1997; Naples, 2003). I was reminded of the entwined nature of knowledge by one of my Elders:

When you tell a story, you are telling that story for everyone, so you are speaking for your community, and your actions reflect who they are. You never speak alone; you speak for what we were, what we are. And also what we want to be. (Michael Paul, personal communication, July 2004)

Throughout the study I have gathered data from and through the different locations of facilitator, lead researcher, community member, active participant-observer, and auto-ethnographer, drawing on my own multivocality to negotiate my engagement within and outside the girls' lives. These multiple and overlapping interpretive roles require a disciplined, critical subjectivity that accounts for my position in the research.

For instance, while my subjectivity is shaped by my family's and my community's experiences with colonialism, social exclusion, and forced hybridity, unlike the girls, I have privileged access, as an academic, to tools for articulating counter stories and disseminating them through institutionally recognized avenues which, in turn, bolster my academic and professional standing. Further, although my doctoral process is embedded in a larger collaborative study and I remain actively involved as an Anti-dote board member, I articulate my interpretation in relative isolation from my research partners, and in a format that is not readily accessible to girls.

My analytical process is therefore always entangled in the collective nature of PAR research. The academic requirement to make individualized knowledge claims collides with my deep belief in communal ownership of knowledge. I travel these epistemological fissures with trepidation, humility, and a sense of self-questioning. At different times during my process of finding my voice as a researcher and a doctoral student, the meaningful, sustaining relationships I developed with the research group have also been sites of silencing, power struggles, and conflicting allegiances. It is within these liminal and contested spaces of interchange, movement, and friction—a place of revolving dis/engagement with the many strings that hold me accountable to the PAR process—that this dissertation emerges.

Interpretive Dilemmas

The interwoven layers of 'answerability' in PAR studies create difficult ethical and conceptual dilemmas for researchers. I have carefully attended to debates on data

interpretation within PAR, particularly those that relate to the validity of knowledge claims within cogenerated projects. However, the vernacular of PAR data interpretation offers few guidelines for navigating the challenging terrain of collective knowledge claims. While PAR methodologies contribute valuable principles and practices, they provide a rather thin analytical structure for systematic and comprehensive data interpretation (Bradbury & Reason, 2003; Cook & Campbell, 1976; Kock, McQueen, & Scott, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Maguire, 2001). Since PAR researchers are committed to “opening up the private lives of participants to the public,” it is ironic, as Conostas (1992) argues, that our own methods of analysis “often remain private and unavailable for public inspection” (p. 254). To define and assess the PAR process itself is particularly difficult. Because PAR outcomes are shaped by communal knowledge and the co-construction of praxis, prescriptive analytical procedures that objectify data as separate from the collaborative process fail to capture the most integral aspects of PAR (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morawski, 2001; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993). As a result, PAR researchers are often criticized for overemphasizing the collective praxis-making process of PAR while undertheorizing and obscuring salient dilemmas in data interpretation.

My approach to PAR precludes a rigid analytical model to objectify and legitimize my analytical claims, but I have nonetheless struggled with negotiating issues of power, accountability, and analytical trustworthiness. I have had to consider several critical questions: How do I reconcile and adequately represent multiple interpretations within a dissertation that makes individual claims to knowledge? What interpretive methods will reflect the coherence I have achieved between my research design and methodology, my own epistemological and ontological locations, and our research team’s ideologies about social change and feminist research? What kinds of interpretive

processes have the capacity to produce concrete, relevant tools for my research partners and the development of their communities?

To make data interpretation procedures more transparent in PAR, reliability, validity, and trustworthiness must be established through ongoing verification strategies and participant checking. This requires a dynamic and recursive interpretive dialogue—or triangulation—among many sources in an “interpretive community” (Fish, 1980; Tappan & Brown, 1992). The sources that represented my interpretive community, and with which I established interpretive engagement, included my own interpretive voice as a researcher-practitioner-student; the documented perspectives of coparticipants, audiences, and community members involved in the research; other data documented throughout the project, including that produced through various documentation, projects, and presentations by members of Anti-dote; and existing literature and research in my areas of interest, including the ideological and conceptual frameworks that inform the study.

Constructing a Model for Data Analysis

To address the shortcomings of data underanalysis in PAR, I have mapped out various interpretive frameworks and woven them into an interdisciplinary theory of interpretation that represents the epistemological lineage of my research. Rather than tie myself to a single analytical approach, I have blended several interpretive methods to assemble what Weis and Fine (2004) term a ‘compositional theory of method.’ Weis and Fine highlight the interplay between theory and practice, providing both dense analytical interpretations of the social matrix and concrete applications by which to foment social change with and by communities. Their theory of method is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive; Weis and Fine represent it as “a series of possible design frameworks that may prove useful in research on social (in)justice” (p. xx). I used this five-step method, described below, to read, interpret, and theorize my data.

In the first interpretive step, *full compositional analysis*, I map the research site as a functioning system. I first survey the data and identify patterns that help to unify an “aggregate view and ideological representation of the whole” (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xx). This step involves teasing out dominant and familiar interpretations of the data, allowing the practical lessons contained in the data to yield fundamental theoretical patterns.

The second step of *first fracturing analysis* exposes evident or visible contradictions in the data, interrupting the sense of coherence established during the first step. The fracturing analyses destabilize the first step’s homogenous mapping through an “interior analysis of the institution/community through lines of difference and power” (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xx). In this step, I specify dynamics of hegemony, disjuncture, and difference, fragmenting my earlier representations of congruence and stability in the research site.

The third step introduces a *counteranalysis* to reveal hidden fractures in the data. More evident fractures are further complexified and destabilized by juxtaposing “the principle fracture lines with other lines of challenging analysis ... to reveal the competing stories that can be told ... and where mobilization can begin” (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xxi). The counteranalysis allows me to view my own agencies and complicities in all their complexity, to link my findings within and across multiple social structures, and to specify complexities and contradictions within the lines of power that permeate the data.

The fourth step, *historic trajectory*, highlights the interconnected historical relationships that structure the lines of power—or what Weis and Fine (2004) call the “field of force” that shapes our everyday social practices (p. xxi). This historicized analysis maps the shifting sociopolitical, cultural, and economic conditions that structure everyday stories, including researchers’ interpretations of their data.

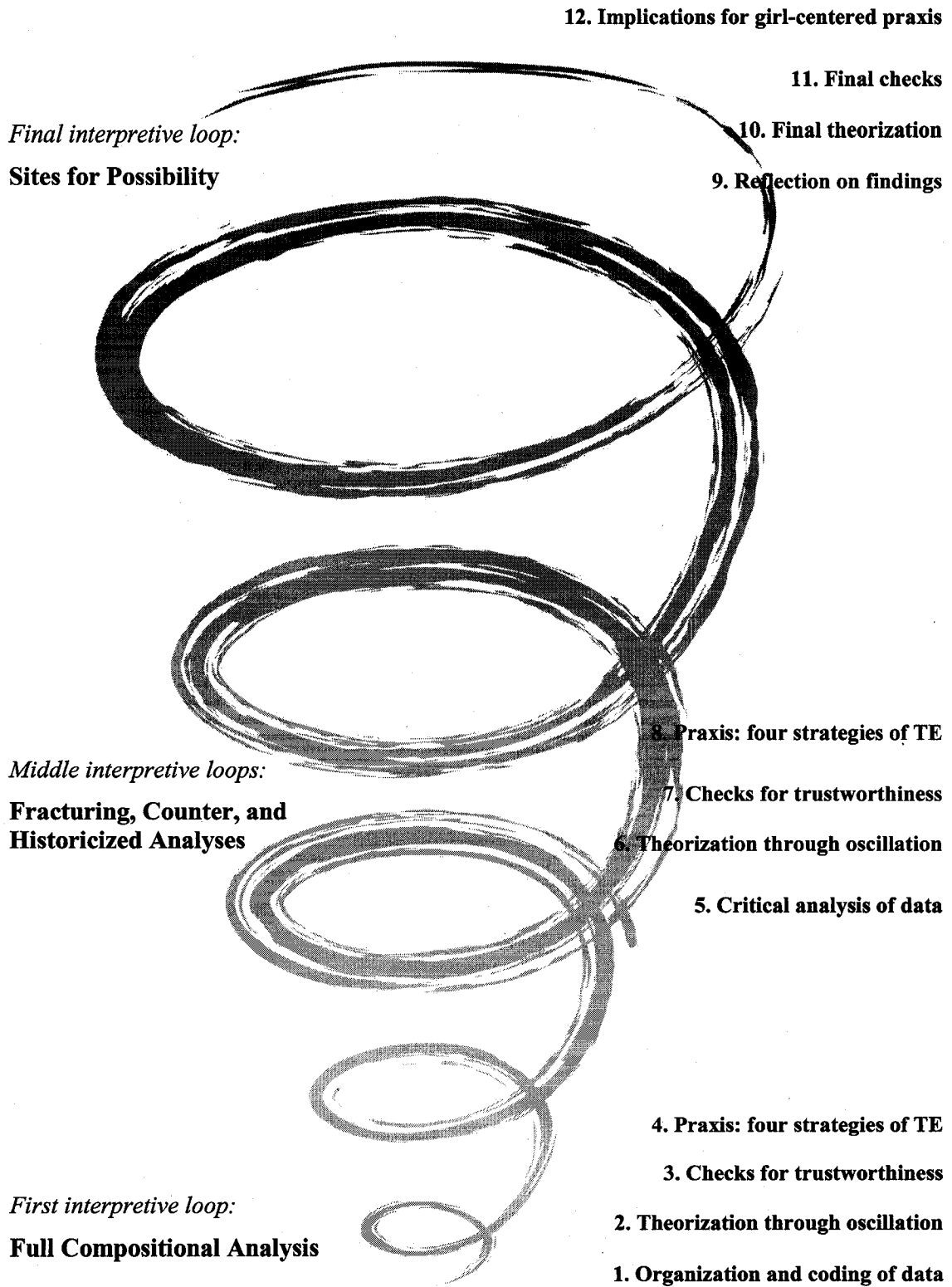
The fifth and final step helps to reveal *sites for possibility*. Weis and Fine (2004) stress that researchers have an ethical obligation not only to contest ideological

homogeneity and dislodge hegemonic discourses and practices, but also to document “those spaces, relations and/or practices in which possibility flourishes or critique gets heard” (p. xxi). By working toward what Lather (1991) terms ‘catalytic validity’—research findings and outcomes that produce social action—we can reveal spaces for solidarity and resistance within the contexts of participatory research and community-based social change.

The Interpretive Spiral Model for Data Interpretation

I devised an original Interpretive Spiral Model (ISM; see Figure 8.1 below) to enact Weis and Fine’s five interpretive steps. The ISM is informed by ethnography, Indigenous and postcolonial methodologies, theories of applied youth work and girlhood studies, and feminist and community action-based practices.

Figure 8.1 Interpretive spiral model (ISM)



My ISM comprises a series of analytical loops; each reproduces the exploration-analysis-action-praxis process exemplified in PAR. The model presents a multifaceted, fluid method to understand and work with continuously emerging data and their multiple and collective interpretations.

As Figure 8.1 demonstrates, at each loop of the ISM, I provide a comprehensive methodological process to 'spiral through' the iterative process of reflection, analysis, and praxis making. Working from the notions of hybridity and organic movement that characterize my research as a whole, I have drawn on notions of spiralling (Freire, 1971, 1973), dynamism (Alford, 1998; Deleuze, 1994), and oscillation (Weis & Fine, 2004) to devise an interpretive method that moves the researcher both upwards and across the interpretive spiral. This process involved first reading the data, categorizing it into themes, interpreting findings, developing theory, linking theory to practice, and, finally, creating praxis. As I move up and across the spiral, I employ Weis and Fine's interpretive steps to explore my five research questions.

The deliberately dynamic and generative nature of the spiral model disputes the dominant tendency to freeze interpretations as a means of objectifying research findings and making incontestable claims to truth. The ISM is congruent with my own epistemological and ontological locations as an interdisciplinary, 'in-between' knower, shaping knowledge by engaging with various sources of data and documentation, fields of study, interpretive communities, and contexts of research and practice. It is also consistent with the complexity of my interpretive questions and is therefore necessary and theoretically relevant, particularly given the dearth of comprehensive interpretive frameworks to assess and problematize PAR.

CHAPTER 9:
APPLICATION OF THE INTERPRETIVE SPIRAL MODEL (ISM) FOR DATA
INTERPRETATION

I move now to the application of my Interpretative Spiral Model (ISM) to data interpretation. The ISM involves a process of theoretical ‘oscillation,’ connecting structural and individual contexts with theoretical and applied phenomena. As represented in Figure 8.1 (see p. 128, Chapter 8) my interpretive process comprises five interpretive loops in three sections: first (one loop), middle (three loops), and final (one loop). The loops correspond to the five interpretive steps suggested by Weis and Fine (2004). My research questions (included below) provide entry points into the data.⁴² Each of the loops involves a different interpretive focus and addresses specific aspects of the research questions. Each loop builds on the one before to inform implications for praxis—in this case, the central pivot concept of transformative engagement and its relationship to transformative, girl-centered research and practice with/by racialized minority girls. Here, I describe each loop or cycle of data interpretation, including an overview of the findings yielded in each step of the interpretive process.

Research Questions

To highlight the challenges and outcomes of community-based feminist action research in the promotion of TE, I expanded the four broad research questions I presented in Chapter 1, as shown below.

1. Under what circumstances, and with what outcomes and challenges, can participatory, expressive, and action-based feminist research become a site for the TE of racialized minority girls? What kinds of processes and practices supported
-

⁴² As I clarified in chapter 4, in this dissertation I focus more on procedural data—reflections on our application of our methodologies.

or hindered participants' experiences of TE, including building transformative relationships and critical consciousness, producing new knowledge about themselves, and engaging in social change?

2. What are the social contexts in which the girls' experiences of belonging/unbelonging emerge? How do the social locations of racialized minority girls as gendered, racialized, classed, sexualized, colonized subjects mediate their experiences of TE?
3. What conceptual, theoretical, and practical dilemmas are faced by multipositioned researcher-practitioners such as myself in facilitating TE? How did I, as a racialized feminist researcher, actualize the principles and methods of our research design and locate myself within the themes and process of the research?
4. How can the strategies of TE become useful tools to nurture girls' engagement in community and involve them as advocates and peer leaders? How can these tools be used as a catalyst for feminist practices of decolonization and social change by and for racialized girls and women?

First Interpretive Loop: Full Compositional Analysis

In the first interpretive loop, the full compositional analysis (see Figure 9.1), I surveyed the data to identify one unifying meta-theme or pivot concept. This first cycle of analysis yielded the praxis concept of 'transformative engagement,' around which I have organized my entire analysis. As illustrated in Figure 9.1, my oscillating interpretive process involved several steps: first I organized and coded my data as an initial theorization of the emerging patterns in my data. Next, I checked the congruence and trustworthiness of my analysis in consultation with my interpretive community. Finally, I mapped my pivot concept.

Figure 9.1 First interpretive loop: Full compositional analysis.

First Loop Interpretive Steps:

1. Coding and critical analysis of data
2. Theorization through oscillation:
Full compositional analysis
3. Checks for congruence and trustworthiness (drawing on interpretive community)
4. Emergent praxis/initial findings: Expressive, participatory and action-based research as a site for racialized minority girls' transformative engagement



Finding a Pivot Concept

As the first step in identifying a pivot concept, I divided the data into two types: (1) procedural data (data about the research process itself, e.g., my field notes or our project evaluations); and (2) content data (items that represented the research themes, e.g., the scripts from our theatre production). I focused specifically on the procedural data, which I organized into broad thematic categories (see Table 9.1) and then created related subthemes. For example, under the thematic category of 'PAR,' subthemes included feminist applications of PAR, age dynamics, and power struggles. I contextualized the stories under each subtheme by triangulating them with other sources of data, including theoretical perspectives from relevant literature.⁴³ I then cross-referenced my most relevant categories and subthemes into more substantive theoretical themes. At this stage, I found it challenging to maintain a balanced, consistent approach to the data while responding to its fluidity and dynamism. I continued to elaborate and code my subthemes, adding stories, comparing my substantive categories, and looking for a central theme that unified all the stories. I repeated this process until I identified an

⁴³ Some parts of the data struck me as more prominent or significant than others. I used my own intuition about their potential significance without discarding the important insights offered by the rest of the data. I also identified and set aside for further analysis a variety of data satellites or theoretical 'orphans,' pieces of data that did not immediately fit into my identified categories or subthemes.

overall design or pattern—transformative engagement—which seemed to characterize the iterative evolution of the girls’ experiences within the project and which conveyed connections between the various data related to the girls’ social locations, their experiences of participation, the transformative outcomes of the project, and the principles and practices of our research design. The results of this process are summarized in Table 9.1 below.

Table 9.1 Finding a pivot concept.

THEMATIC CATEGORIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • popular theatre (PT) • participatory action research (PAR) • social locations and histories • logistics
SUBTHEMES⁴⁴	
PT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitation • group dynamics • voice • critical consciousness
PAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feminist applications • intergenerational issues • power dynamics
Social locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intercultural dynamics in the group • racialization • class • girl/women partnerships
Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruitment • scheduling • methodological concerns
DATA SATELLITES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personality conflicts • food • academic audiences • my role as a doctoral student
PIVOT CONCEPT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transformative engagement

⁴⁴ I documented stories to illustrate each subtheme, which I contextualized using triangulation with other sources of data, including imported theoretical perspectives.

Conceptualizing the Pivot Concept

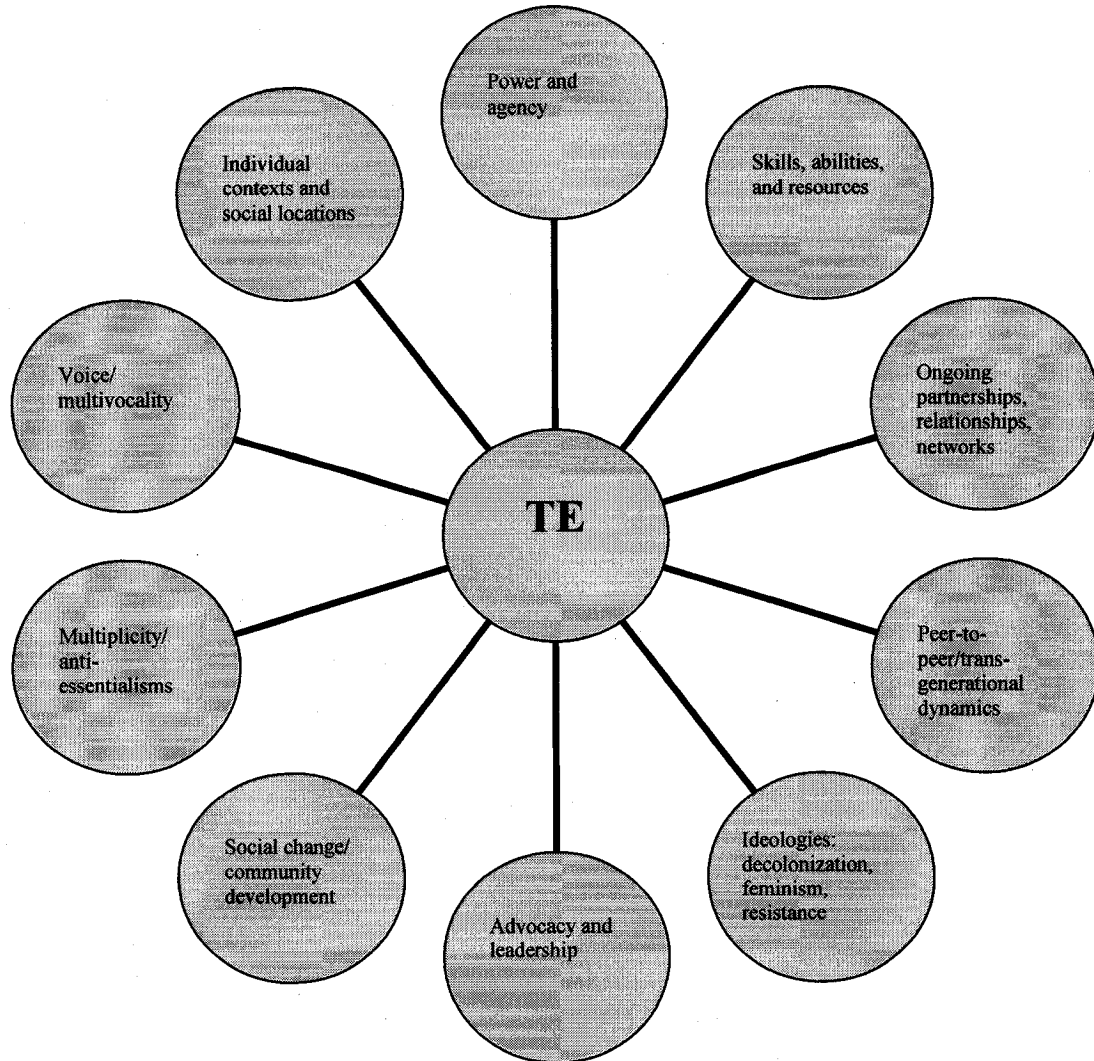
Once I had selected a pivot concept around which to shape my data analysis, I began to develop a series of new mental maps, forming in that process a loose set of interconnected categories related to TE. In a first cycle of this process, I focused on the relationship between my data, the literature, and the Anti-dote documentation. I cross-referenced my data with my existing thematic categories, subcategories, and the literature to identify relevant coding categories, as summarized in Table 8.2 below.

Table 9.2 Coding categories related to transformative engagement.

1	Critical reflections and actions around power/power sharing
2	Reciprocity and accountability
3	Peer-to-peer leadership/peer mentoring
4	Voice/multivocality
5	Transgenerational relationships and mentoring
6	Critical consciousness
7	Articulation of disagreement/complexities
8	Facilitation
9	Drama narratives, producing counter stories
10	Participation
11	Exclusion
12	Agency
13	Ongoing collaboration and interaction
14	Layers of social change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal and interpersonal • organizational and institutional • social and community-based

At the end of this process, I had mapped and conceptualized the different dimensions of TE (see Figure 9.2).

Figure 9.2 The dimensions of transformative engagement.



The Four Intersecting Strategies of Transformative Engagement

I now had a list of themes and dimensions related to the praxis of TE, but I had yet to determine what held them all together, and how the themes reflected, problematized, or helped to facilitate TE. Therefore, I strengthened the links between each category and explored the multiple facets suggested by these connections, as well as possible relationships with the satellite categories left behind. In a second layer of mental mapping, I tried to construct overarching meta-concepts that would hold together all of

the important aspects of transformative engagement. Eventually, I articulated four processes or elements—*border crossing; communities of belonging; critical knowledge; and action*—which seemed critical to TE. Initially, I characterized these in terms of foundational elements or facilitative processes. I realized, however, that constitutive nouns, although they imply movement and change, suggest something that happened *to* the girls rather than something they engaged in themselves (i.e., a passive rather than an active stance). This more static representation did not convey the agency entrenched in the process of TE. Therefore, I decided to shift the focus of my conceptual analysis from *process to praxis*. This shift led to the conception of *strategies* of TE rather than processes, a conceptualization that makes more visible the agency involved in shaping TE, and that identifies the conjuncture of theory and practice as an important site for the emergence of TE.

Interpretive Loops: First Fracturing, Counter, and Historicized Analyses

I then advanced to the middle set of loops: first fracturing analysis, counteranalysis, and historicized analysis (Weis & Fine, 2004). This stage involved reanalyzing the dominant patterns in the data. I reviewed my original data, including my field notes, as well as our design goals and research themes, with a view to articulating the fissures, challenges, and successes related to each of the four intersecting strategies of TE. At this stage, I focused on the first three of my four research questions:

1. Under what circumstances, and with what outcomes and challenges, can participatory, expressive, and action-based feminist research become a site for racialized minority girls' TE? What kinds of processes and practices supported or hindered participants' experiences of TE, including building transformative relationships and critical consciousness, producing new knowledge about themselves, and engaging in social change?
2. What are the social contexts in which the girls' experiences of belonging/unbelonging emerge? How do the particular social locations of racialized minority girls as gendered, racialized, classed, sexualized, colonized subjects, mediate their experiences of TE?

3. What conceptual, theoretical and practical dilemmas do multipositioned researcher-practitioners such as myself, face in facilitating TE? How did I, as a racialized feminist researcher, actualize the principles and methods of our research design and locate myself within the themes and process of the research?

As illustrated in Figure 9.3, the middle loops of the ISM focus on theorizing and problematizing the pivot concept of TE and its four intersecting strategies. In these loops, I identified relational fissures and linkages both among and across the data, theorizing in relation to the overarching theme of TE, while keeping in mind that this theme was continuously shifting and thus inherently partial. The ISM deliberately incorporates analytical trajectories that cut across global, structural, local, intersubjective, and individual particularities; this enabled me to locate my data and research questions within a broader sociopolitical narrative, making critical sense of the fissures and tensions while also weaving together a whole with implications for social action. For example, I used Weis and Fine's analytical turns to illustrate how social meta-processes, such as historical colonialism and gendered racialization, were experienced, replicated, and/or transformed on multiple levels, both in the lives of participants, and within "It's About Us" itself. At the end of this middle stage of the interpretive process, I had further conceptualized the four intersecting strategies of TE. These results are presented in Chapters 11-14.

Figure 9.3 Middle interpretive loops: Fracturing, counter, and historicized analyses

Interpretive Steps:

5. Coding and critical analysis of data
6. Theorization through oscillation: First fracturing analysis, counter-analysis, and historicized analysis
7. Checks for congruence and trustworthiness (drawing on interpretive community)
8. Emergent praxis: **Dilemmas in implementing the four intersecting strategies of TE**



Final Interpretive Loop: Sites for Possibility

In the final loop of the spiral (see Figure 9.4 below), I explored ‘sites for possibility’—spaces for solidarity and resistance within the contexts of feminist participatory research and community-based social change. During this stage, drawing on Weis and Fine’s (2004) final interpretive turn, creating “sites for possibility”, I focused on my last research question to elaborate the implications of my findings for girl-centered research, policy, and practice for social change:

4. How can the strategies of TE become useful tools to engender girls’ engagement in community and to involve them as advocates and peer leaders? How can they be used as a catalyst for feminist practices of decolonization and social change by and for racialized girls and women?

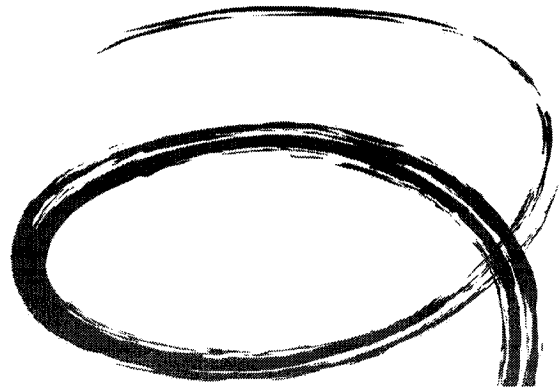
Following an oscillating interpretive process similar to that employed in the preceding steps, I first reviewed and reflected on the findings from the middle loop and checked for congruence and trustworthiness by triangulating my findings with my interpretive community. Once again, I reviewed my data for other possible

interpretations, constantly comparing categories; identifying meaningful connections between fissures, disjunctures, and discrepancies; and identifying common themes.

Figure 9.4 Final interpretive loop: Sites for possibility

Interpretive Steps:

9. Final review and reflections on middle loop findings
10. Theorization through oscillation: Sites for possibility
11. Checks for congruence and trustworthiness (drawing on interpretive community)
12. Praxis: **Implications of findings for girl-centered research, policy and practice.**



Conclusion

As my findings have demonstrated, the multitextured analysis represented by the ISM provides both a context and a method to theorize the relationship between the everyday events recorded in my data, and the larger structural dimensions in which they are embedded. I hope that this model is useful to other researchers who have struggled with the epistemic and ontological dilemmas of data analysis in PAR.

In the next chapter, I explore the concept of the praxis of TE and its four intersecting facilitative strategies. Subsequent chapters elaborate these strategies and identify broader implications for policy, practice, and research with racialized girls.

CHAPTER 10:

INTERSECTING STRATEGIES OF TRANSFORMATIVE ENGAGEMENT

And then soon enough, we're like doing conferences and stuff, then you see the result and you feel really proud, you want to share that with others, you want to sort of keep it going, because it makes you feel really powerful. (Jillien, participant-researcher)

In Chapter 5, I described enabling conditions that created relational, conceptual and methodological entry points into a girl-friendly research space within which transformative engagement (TE) could be animated and deepened. I now turn my attention to teasing out the multifaceted strategies and outcomes of TE. In this first loop of my Interpretive Spiral Model (ISM), I clarify how and under what conditions girls become engaged in community-based feminist participatory research, as well as if and how this engagement becomes transformative, that is, results in some form of personal, interpersonal, community, institutional, or systemic change relevant to girls' needs and realities. Later in the chapter, I speak to problematic assumptions in debates about girls' agency, civic participation, and citizenship formation. I draw on this discussion to contextualize my own model of TE to the unique experiences of minority girls.

A Model of Transformative Engagement

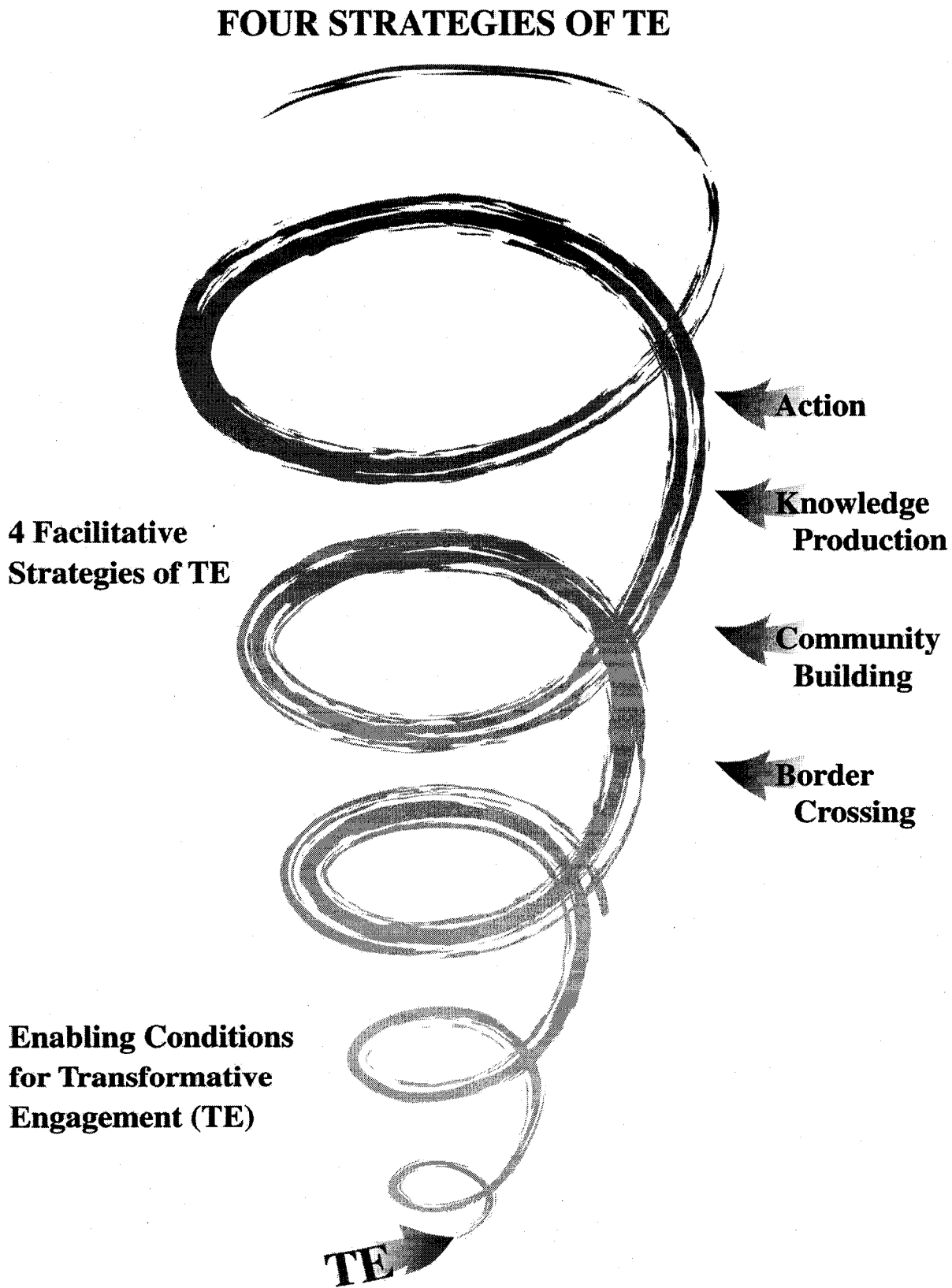
My conceptualization of TE, represented in Figure 10.1, proposes the following:

1. TE is a dynamic, fluid, and indeterminate process; it emerged through key enabling conditions (discussed in Chapter 5).
2. TE is a form of praxis that is actualized through a mutually reinforcing relationship between engagement processes and transformative outcomes. My findings reveal that when engagement is transformative (i.e., when it has significant transformative effects at a personal, group, or community level), girls are more likely to become, and to remain, meaningfully engaged.

Correspondingly, when meaningful engagement is the primary vehicle for transformation (i.e., when it provides a sense of purpose and ownership, reflects girls' needs and experiences, and coincides with their goals for social change), the transformational aspects of the research are more likely to be sustainable and to enhance individual and community capacity.

3. TE evolves through the facilitative effects of four intersecting strategies: border crossing; creating communities of solidarity; developing critical knowledge; and engaging in action. Based on my analysis of the data, I argue that these were key facilitative strategies for the development of transformative outcomes that are concrete, sustainable, and meaningful to the girls.
4. TE is a form of oppositional agency in what I characterize as a context of 'structural disengagement,' where racialized minority girls are constructed as outsiders to discourses and practices of participation and social belonging, and face systemic barriers to engagement related to race, language, class, citizenship, religion, sexuality and gender, among others.

Figure 10.1 The evolution of TE praxis through four intersecting strategies.



The Praxis of Transformative Engagement

As a form of praxis, TE speaks to the girls' ability to move within and across theory and practice to engage, on their own terms, in transformative experiences which they claim provided them with a sense of voice, belonging, and advocacy. My conceptualization of strategies of praxis as a representation of girls' agentic capacity is congruent with the process of feminist PAR (FPAR); it relays the coalescence between postcolonial and transnational feminist theories, community-based research, minority girls' voices and experiences, expressive methodologies, and practices of social change.

I do not propose that TE is an external process that is superimposed onto girls to support their agency; rather, I argue that girls are always actively engaged in constructing and shaping their practices of engagement. I posit that transformative outcomes may occur under certain conditions, specifically, when supported by four strategies that guide, focus, expand, and deepen girls' strategies of engagement to respond specifically to the barriers and needs they have identified. This process is actualized through the cycle of FPAR. In one of our final evaluative sessions, Jillien described how her experience of TE was nurtured and intensified by the cycle of: (1) *building community* (2) *coming to critical consciousness* and *developing analysis* and (3) *engaging in action*.

Community building: The more we just got into it, the more I felt like I finally found a space, just a space to talk about my life, my background. And then it just grew from that, once you get that bond going, you just feel stronger, you're not alone, so you can keep going with sharing what you go through.

Critical consciousness and analysis: It all starts to make sense ... you get that understanding of where racism and stuff comes from. I learned that understanding of what racialization is about, that helped a lot.

Action: And then soon enough, we're like doing conferences and stuff, then you see the result and you feel really proud, you want to share that with others, you want to sort of keep it going, because it makes you feel really powerful.

Jillien's reflections illustrate that engagement becomes transformative only when the context of engagement addresses, within their particular context, girls' interrelated need for a communal process that builds critical consciousness and provides opportunities for action. The result is a multidimensional collaborative process that involves layers of personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional change. In our project, these layers of change have documented results that speak clearly to the many successes of "It's About Us." The girls produced several notable research outcomes that served as touchstones throughout the iterative, evolving process. These include:

- a 45-minute theatre production comprising four vignettes, a theatre forum piece, and a photovoice presentation;
- two prime-time local news features and several newspaper articles;
- participation in a girls' advisory committee for planning a conference;
- presentations at two international academic conferences ("International Social Sciences Symposium" at the University of Victoria and "Redefining Girlhood" at Concordia University, Montreal);
- presentations at two community venues (Anti-dote's first AGM and the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria);
- presentations at two girls' conferences (the "It's About Us" conference on girls, race, and identity in Victoria, B.C. and the Girl Power Camp in the Laurentians, Quebec); and
- participation in the creation of Anti-dote.

This diversity of outcomes, roles, and sites of engagement and dissemination characterizes TE as a dynamic, organic continuum rather than a determinate, linear or formulaic process with guaranteed results. As illustrated in Figure 10.1, our project required numerous access and exit points, multiple mediums and contexts for

engagement, different applications and outcomes, and pathways for both short- and long-term participation. The pace, extent, context, and nature of TE is never homogenous in its effects on the girls; this flexibility is a crucial enabling condition of TE. It illustrates how, despite barriers and challenges, girls' commitment to and desire for engagement intersects with the availability of an appropriate medium, supportive partnerships, adequate resources, and institutional supports to generate transformation grounded in their needs and realities.

Transformative Engagement and Oppositional Agency

In order to stimulate a process of TE and to understand the complex interplay of enabling conditions, processes, and outcomes that sustain and deepen it, it is essential to problematize the much-debated concept of agency and to determine how girls' agency operates, that is, how and why girls assert agency, in what contexts they do so, and with what outcomes.

In Chapter 3, I surveyed diverse conceptualizations of girls' agency as synonymous to voice; as inherently positive and transformative; as self-determined or contained solely within the individual; as equally accessible to all girls; and as a linear, static, transferable, and measurable entity (i.e., as a state of mind, something girls either have or do not have, which can be produced, marketed, consumed, and transferred between agents). None of these depictions, however, entirely accounts for the experiences of the girls in "It's About Us."

First, dichotomies of girls as either victims of culture or as consistently empowered agents foreclose a more nuanced understanding of how girls negotiate girlhood within multiple claims about their agency and identities. The girls disturbed these monoliths both in our own project and in their social interactions. My data analysis demonstrates that the girls, variously passive and silenced, articulate and politicized, or

aggressive and explicitly sexualized, employed multiple and often contradictory strategies that cut across all of the available constructions of agency. Their engagement was incongruent with compartmentalized depictions, difficult to predict, and impossible to facilitate with formulaic mechanisms. Girls' agency is best understood as produced at the nexus of multiple, competing influences involving power, constructions of girlhood, race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, voice, choice, control, and representation. This intersectional reading of agency has implications for understanding how and why racialized minority girls might become purposefully engaged in practices for social change.

Based on my analysis, I propose that the specific iteration of agency involved in TE is a form of purposeful 'oppositional agency.' I conceptualize oppositional agency as a vehicle for producing and disseminating counter stories, which "interrupt, contradict, expose, challenge or deny... refuse dominant constructions of social realities, reveal the fractures in structures, discourses and practices of domination and, indeed, change the subject" (Harris, Carney, & Fine, 2001, p. 6). These stories, in turn, provide a foundation for engaging in practices of social change and community development, resulting in a new loop of TE—and another level of interaction between theory and practice.

The debate about girls' agency and self-determination echoes the controversy within FPAR over the extent to which emancipatory politics "require the conception of an individual agent capable of self-reflection, self-determination and autonomy or whether agency is merely the result of the cultural (including gender) constitution of the subject" (Henze, 2005, p. 42). While girls are not the passive, voiceless objects found in some representations of girlhood, their agency is nonetheless always exerted within structural constraints, or what Ralston calls "constrained spaces" (1998). My model of TE disentangles how girls demonstrate a specific iteration of agency—purposeful, oppositional, transformative, grassroots, advocacy based, and infused with anti-racism,

anti-colonial, and feminist principles—within these constrained spaces, even when they may have limited opportunities or venues to do so on their own terms. As I argue below, this understanding of TE has much to contribute to debates and models of youth engagement and participation.

The ‘Engaged’ Girl: Girlhood and the Trend of Engagement

My conceptualization of TE addresses some of the shortcomings of current trends in policy, research, and practice related to promoting the social inclusion and civic participation of youth and girls. I present this discussion here because it helps to situate my conceptualization of TE in relation to ongoing debates about their practices of community, civic, sociocultural and political engagement. A full discussion of citizenship as it is conceptualized in political and sociological studies is beyond the scope of this chapter. For the purposes of the current research, I take a close look at the day-to-day, on-the-ground micropractices that constitute girls’ engagement, social inclusion, and citizenship-making within and across their communities.

Youth, girls, and specifically girls of colour already fall outside of most formal or legalistic measures of citizenship (financial and social independence, moral rationality, political and voting rights, age of majority, land and property ownership, etc.). Hence, youth citizenship is usually viewed as an ambiguous and often problematic sociocultural phenomena rather than as a clearly delineated political or legal category.

Harris identifies two competing discourses related to youth engagement and participation (2004b). These discourses reflect the duality between the dominant neoconservative discourse of ‘responsibilities’ and the neoliberal counterdiscourse of ‘rights.’ Both discourses acknowledge that, in late modernity, youth struggle with developing citizenship. Both identify disengagement as a barrier to the achievement of civic participation among youth (Harris, 2004b). Harris argues that the two discourses

differ in their analysis of the causes and interventions to address this disengagement. The dominant discourse, which I address first, focuses on the provision of education about and enforcement of responsibilities and obligations. The counterdiscourse advocates for opportunities for girls to express entitlements and actualize universal rights to participation and belonging.

Dangerous Girls and the Responsibilities Debate

The ‘responsibilities’ discourse has emerged in reaction to what is perceived as an increase in youth delinquency, crime, and violence that is attributed to young people’s diminished sense of social accountability, civic responsibility, and citizenship:

This master narrative is one that above all underlines obligations. In short, young people need to prove their entitlement to participation in their social worlds. There is an emphasis on their social debt, and on the importance of establishing youth responsibilities before youth rights (Harris, 2001a, p. 184).

Proponents of this discourse argue that the solution to youth disenfranchisement is to increase the surveillance and policing of youth culture. Programs associated with this account aim to promote responsibility and moral action through such interventions as boot camps, religious schools, and ‘virtues’ education, which are seen as a way for youth to earn participatory rights and become legitimate citizens (Aapola et al., 2005).

Within this discourse of nationhood and civic belonging, the dominant citizenry—White, Christian, heterosexual, middle-class—is privileged, while those deemed to be illegitimate Others are systematically subjugated outside of the process of nation building. For example, this discourse supports capitalist concerns about the full integration of youth into the labour force and the amplification of the roles of youth as consumers. Simultaneously, it advocates constitutional constraints on the fluid nature of citizenship by limiting access to full citizenship to racialized Others, such as Chinese and Mexican immigrants.

Understandably, the evolution of this neoconservative discourse has important implications for a project such as “It’s About Us”; it is a deeply gendered discourse that also constitutes girls’ citizenship and social belonging in relation to national identity. Recently, in response to the perception of girls’ growing sexualization and aggression, there has been a resurgence of the neoconservative, religious characterization of girls as morally pure and as needing to be groomed as future representatives of the nation. This movement has resulted in social services for girls who are perceived to be ‘at risk’ and in need of state-funded moral interventions (France, 1998).

Here again, we see that the construction of girls as a high risk population stigmatizes those who “diverge from a set norm, which has been defined in large part by white middle-class standards” (Ravitch, 1998, p. 112). Efforts to manage and limit girls’ civic engagement have resulted in policy and program developments that further pathologize girls of colour, providing fewer opportunities for engagement and citizenship building outside of state-mandated mediums. As I have demonstrated in my exploration of the themes that emerged from our exploratory study and the impetus behind “It’s About Us,” this is an account of girls’ citizenship from which the girls felt excluded and that they wanted to challenge, both within our small research group and in their public advocacy. Our focus group data demonstrates that many of the girls felt under- and misrepresented in systems, that is, in policies, social programs, social institutions, research, and academia, that might provide avenues for citizenship building.

Good Girls and the Child Rights Debate

The dominant ‘responsibilities’ discourse is counterbalanced by a neoliberal rights-based discourse that argues that girls are disengaged because they are systematically excluded from important arenas of decision making (Harris, 2001a). This counterdiscourse provides legitimacy to participatory girl-centered research projects such as ours. The engagement of socially excluded populations, including girls, ethnic

minorities, and Aboriginal youth, has become an increasingly important focus of policy, practice, and research.⁴⁵ In these initiatives, engagement is conceptualized as foundational to the development of much-needed sociocultural capital among socially excluded populations, including girls of colour (Galabuzi, 2004).

Following the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (CRC)⁴⁶ which contains four articles that anchor the characterization of youth citizenry and civic participation as universal rights, the idea of ‘youth engagement’ gained momentum in public policy, research, and human services. Several prominent youth policy think tanks⁴⁷ have linked children’s healthy sociocultural development to their ability to participate meaningfully as citizens. This has spawned the growth of mechanisms for their political and civic participation, including youth boards, youth parliaments, youth-led organizations, and youth institutes. Research about these mechanisms has demonstrated that a focus on the strengths and capacities of youth and an investment in their engagement yields better outcomes, is less costly, and is more beneficial than problem-based approaches such as those espoused by the ‘responsibilities’ advocates (Tonkin, 2002).

The ‘girl child’ movement is a girl-centered iteration of the child rights debate. Girl child advocates, such as human rights and nongovernmental organizations, have pinpointed ethical concerns about girls’ particular vulnerabilities and needs as global

⁴⁵ For example, Aboriginal and immigrant children and youth—and girls in particular—have been identified as a research priority by the Canadian Research Council and Save the Children; the national organization Caring for First Nations Children and Families Society is undertaking a national consultation on Aboriginal youth participation; at a provincial level, BC’s Child and Youth Officer funds a youth engagement program, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development has assembled an Aboriginal Youth Advisory task force.

⁴⁶ The CRC, ratified by 191 countries, contains 54 articles that cover civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights. The CRC asserts that human rights apply to children under the age of 18 and that these rights are equal, nonhierarchical, and indivisible.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the McCreary Center Society, the National Center for Excellence on Youth Engagement, the Search Institute, the Canadian Research Council, Save the Children Canada, the Status of Women, the Canadian National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Caring for First Nations Children and Families Society.

citizens, focusing on providing more opportunities for girls to be meaningfully engaged in society, to promote their social integration, and to actualize their rights as full citizens (Harris, 2001a, 2001b). This in turn has supported applications of girls' participation at both grassroots and formal levels, such as in education and health promotion, community-based initiatives, policy development, and political organizations (Aapola et al., 2005).

Complicating Discourses of Girls' Engagement

My conceptualization of TE addresses gaps in both discourses of girls' engagement, in particular, the undertheorized relationship among engagement, race, gender, class, and citizenship formation. Despite their contrasting ideological orientations, both the dominant 'dangerous girl' discourse and the 'good girl' counterdiscourse share a much too linear and static conceptualization of citizenship and social inclusion. Discourses of engagement, like dominant discourses on child and youth development and participation in research, tend to be gender- and race-neutral. For example, of the hundreds of publications, toolkits, handbooks, and projects I reviewed for this dissertation, I found only a handful that specifically dealt with girls' engagement, and even fewer that addressed the engagement of racialized minority and Indigenous girls. Dominant and state-sanctioned policies about engagement and multiculturalism hide contradictions between official discourses of youth participation and the actual experiences of girls of colour. What is not acknowledged is how these discourses that cast girls as cultural producers and consumers, political participants, and moral barometers of the state of the nation effectively manipulate girls into constricted roles while hiding structural and material limitations to full inclusion. A fuller understanding of girls' engagement demands a more critical reading of processes of—and barriers to—citizenship making. I argue that social inclusion, engagement, and citizenship are better

understood as highly hierarchized social processes rather than as moral, philosophical, or ideological positions or as measures of girls' political, economic, and cultural participation and productivity. This is particularly critical in a context of systemic exclusion of girls who are constituted as outside of the nation, despite their established relationships in their communities and their desire to become actively engaged.

Structural Disengagement

In reality, systemic racism, sexism, ageism, classism, and ableism remain important barriers to the full and complex engagement and citizenship of girls of colour, placing them in an ambiguous relationship with their communities and national identities. The unattended friction between engagement, social belonging, and cultural citizenship has powerful consequences for youth and girls. For instance, recent race riots in cities in Europe and the U.S., and in Montreal and Toronto, underscore the alienation of youth of colour from their nations and their local communities. This disengagement, in part an effect of global colonialism and racialization, is one with which the girls in this study were intimately familiar. In a predominantly White community such as Victoria, micropractices of engagement are never neutral or equally accessible, structured as they are by broader social forces that determine which girlhoods are privileged and which are systemically subjugated.

For instance, several of the girls in this project reported repeatedly being asked where "home" was for them, congratulated on their use of "good English," or asked during job interviews if they were eligible to work in Canada. I choose these most obvious examples because their pervasiveness illustrates how discourse of Otherness are made real and normal through everyday practices, and how powerfully and covertly they craft hierarchies of difference and relativism through the systematic Othering of non Euro-Western citizens (Lowe, 1996; Ong & Nonini, 1997).

Girls who fall outside of the dominant White, heterosexual middle class face systemic barriers related to language, class, citizenship, religion, sexuality, and gender. For these girls, the nature and level of their community and civic engagement is a response to their positioning as perpetual outsiders to the nation and their alienation from discourses of citizenship that collapse all girlhoods into homogenous categories that hide inequities and hierarchies of belonging.

Here again, we see that notions of multiplicity, relativism, and 'difference' can be co-opted by state discourses and practices of representation that deny or relativize the material historicisms that create inequity. In other words, differences are deployed and imposed through colonial relations, and the ability to control the ways in which one's identities are claimed, fixed, or complicated is a relative privilege that is not always commensurate with access to equal belonging, human rights, and citizenship. To really understand TE, we have to consider that engagement, and thus disengagement, are structured by social forces rather than by inherent attitudes or aptitudes within the girls themselves, their families, or their communities that predispose some girls to participate and others to disengage.

Certainly, the relative cultural homogeneity of Victoria affords few opportunities for racialized minority girls to become engaged outside of mainstream avenues, while those opportunities that are available are discounted as being less valid, as experienced by Taisha and Manjeet:

If you're not like in Girl Guides or something, then what are you doing?
It's not for us, there's no camps for East Indians or anything. (Manjeet)

Yeah, I volunteered in anti-racism for so long. I did so many presentations, we did, to the Ministry of Education, and schools, and conference, we got awards and everything. But like when I go to find a job or whatever, all they care about are my skills, like from a "real" place. My parents were NOT happy. (Taisha)

SO true, they can't see what you, like, what you got from that work, you know, never mind the leadership, the public speaking, all that, it's just like 'Oh you weren't on student council? Forget it then.' (Manjeet)

What counts as 'successful' engagement in these examples is mediated by dominant ideologies that minimize the legitimacy of feminist, anti-racist girl activism as important contributions to civic society. Manjeet and Taisha emphasize that popularity and leadership are measured by access to dominant kinds of social supports, resources, cultural knowledges, and social spaces that remain out of bounds to many racialized minority girls.

The girls shared many other such instances where they felt their unique strategies of engagement were discounted. For instance, some of the girls and their families preferred that the girls be active in their own extended families and ethnocultural communities rather than engage in mainstream avenues such as school councils and sports teams. While this involvement importantly serves to build sociocultural capital within ethnocultural communities, it remains an unacknowledged form of engagement—the girls do not get school certificates for looking after extended family members, participating in cultural or religious events, or attending language classes. The systemic discounting of non Euro-Western sociocultural capacities becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: The girls are blamed for structural barriers to engagement, portrayed as refusing to 'play the game' (i.e., as being bad citizens), and characterized as disengaged, apathetic, and marginalized, thus 'at risk' and requiring state intervention. This perception further fuels the stereotype of racialized minority girls and their families as 'torn between cultures—the old-world oppressive culture which seeks to suppress their voice and limit their participation and the mainstream culture which seeks to amplify their voices and their rights.

Four Sites for Structural Disengagement

It is critical to make visible the effects of structural barriers to engagement. Girls' disengagement must be understood as carefully managed by state discourses, policies, and systems, as well as underpinned by social formations of gender, race, class, age, and sexuality that prevent girls from being constituted and constituting themselves as full, complex, acting subjects. The girls' focus group comments before and during "It's About Us" reflect the contradictions between discourses of girls as active agents, and their lived experiences as illegitimate citizens. Based on my analysis of the data, I have identified four sites where girls' structural disengagement is most visible: limitations posed by exclusionary borders and gatekeepers that prevented access to resources and skills; lack of social networks of support and influence; marginality to modes of knowledge production; and a scarcity of avenues from which to effect change.

i. Borders of exclusion and lack of access. One of the most significant barriers to engagement reported by the girls were the rigid borders of exclusion and gatekeeping that managed their access to spaces, resources, skills, institutions, and social circles. The girls lacked contexts in which to engage their own cultural knowledges and create a sense of normalcy and belonging.

Barbara remarks on a picture of the Victoria Chinatown gates which she took for her photovoice project:

This is where I feel really Chinese, I am proud of that, it should be like that all over Victoria. (Barbara)

The only time in school, the only time they want to hear about Ethiopian culture, is if we're talking about war or poverty or something just bad—like disease or something, that's pretty much the only time they even wonder about it. (Taisha)

We had to write a paper about religion, and the teacher was talking about her church and stuff, everyone knew all what she was talking about. I thought I would fail. I don't know anybody that's Christian. (Prisha)

ii. Lack of community, social networks and relationships. The demographic homogeneity and lack of ethnocultural community supports and services in Victoria had a significant effect in shaping the girls' identities as 'other than.'

I feel so normal when I go to Vancouver, it's just normal. Here I'm like a show, a thing to look at like, like if you're curious. (Muslim focus group)

I just don't really know anybody here I can talk to about this stuff. (Latina focus group)

It's hard if you bring it up because they, they roll their eyes or whatever and you're just, you just stop bringing it up. (Jillien)

Throughout the project, the girls often commented that they had little involvement in complex and heterogeneous communities of belonging where the full spectrum of their experiences could be acknowledged. Such relationships would provide access to supportive peers and mentors where they could safely debrief without feeling judged or reprimanded for engaging in a more critical analysis of gender and race dynamics.

iii. Lack of critical knowledge. How minority girls understand their own roles depends on available, prevailing, and sanctioned representations of race, gender, and agency. Lack of critical knowledge was identified by the girls as a barrier to developing critical consciousness. The girls wanted language to contest stereotypical and essentialized representations that collapsed their complexity while denying the impact of colonialism in shaping racialized and gendered identities.

If I meet a guy, they're like wow, there's not a lot of Black girls here, they're like obsessed with you. (Taisha)

When I started the project I didn't know how to describe myself as an Asian girl, I just thought "oh well, I'm different." It's like I never even thought it mattered to me.... I just pretended it wasn't there. (Jillien)

Obviously yeah, I do see it, like you know it's happening to you, just the way they look at you, but you just don't know what to say. (Evelyn)

I just don't know a lot about my culture, I just grew up here, kind of White, like I know I'm different, I don't know why or, just, it's like a feeling but you don't know about it. (Latina focus group)

iv. Lack of action. The girls identified the lack of visible advocacy around these issues in Victoria that specifically targeted the needs of girls, and particularly girls of colour.

I wanted to do something about this, like get the people to learn more about Asians, but just not sure, like, I didn't know how. (Barbara)

It's hard to find role models that get this, our teachers aren't like us so sometimes they just don't get it, it bugs me, so I just try to forget about it. (Manjeet)

Well, yeah, but it's hard, like how are you supposed to do that if, well here, here, they don't get it. (Evelyn)

Engagement is never assured by simply inserting socially excluded girls into mechanisms for their participation. We must carefully attend to constraints on self-determination in the 'how, when, where, and why' girls like those in "It's About Us" become engaged. Because their attempts at engagement on their own terms, for example, through avenues such as anti-racism education and settlement work, are not valued and because these activities relay few benefits to the girls or their families, the girls become further disengaged. They have difficulty accessing, or choose not to access, youth boards and youth forums for participation, policy planning, or municipal government that tend to recognize and promote only mainstream, narrow kinds of leadership and definitions of economic and political participation that support dominant social systems and reaffirm the status quo (Harris, 2001a, 2001b, 2004b). Such boards and forums therefore often remain tokenistic and White- and male-dominated.

This is not to say that the girls who identified as being disengaged from mainstream citizenship, whether due to exclusion or as a deliberate strategy for resistance, were simply passive recipients of social exclusion. For some of the girls, their families, and their communities, refusal to engage in mainstream avenues was a form of deliberate dissent, and therefore an important form of oppositional agency, or engagement on their own terms.

The Four Intersecting Strategies of Transformative Engagement

Given the pervasive context of structural disengagement described above, minority girls need creative strategies to negotiate the shifting demands of their multiple worlds in ways that speak to their particular geo-socio-cultural-political realities. The success of our project, and the effectiveness of our transformational methodologies, depended on our ability to sustain the four critical strategies of TE: To promote girls' **border crossing** by troubling exclusionary boundaries and enhancing access to skills, space, resources, and power; to develop **communities** of belonging and solidarity; to produce disruptive, **critical knowledge**; and to engage in public and social **action**. These strategies are what inspire girls to commit to work through the PAR process, even when the larger contexts of their lives is one that would tend to promote systemic disengagement. I briefly outline them here and explicate each in the subsequent four chapters.

i. Border crossing. In our study, the expansion of networks and the troubling of borders and boundaries was an important precursor to the other desired outcomes of the research. Having access to funds, institutions, knowledge, language, and, ultimately, a means of fostering the relationships that are necessary to pursue action provided us with strategies for intervening into hierarchical power dimensions, which is itself a critical component of social action. This is critical given Victoria's context of social exclusion and limited citizenship.

ii. Communities of belonging. The relationships and social networks we developed during the course of the project were crucial to helping the girls develop ownership of the process of TE and to negotiate issues of safety, trust, and belonging in a context of high-risk research. The girls communicated that a safe community and solid personal support systems enhanced their desire to become engaged, placing them in a stronger position to define strategies for advocacy.

iii. Knowledge creation. Once the conditions for the creation and ongoing maintenance of good process were in place, we were able to explore avenues for critical knowledge creation. Knowledge creation requires activists to move beyond the status quo to examine the historical, scientific, and sociopsychological myths that have shaped our conceptions of racialized and gendered identities and to work towards more critical and complex self-representations by using methodologies for counter-storytelling, such as popular theatre.

iv. Action. The integrity of our efforts at knowledge production ultimately depended on the much more elusive development of strategies for community development and social change. Creating and mobilizing such strategies requires us to move beyond the boundaries of our own discussions within insider political communities and into public consciousness. It is in meeting this challenge that many PAR projects collapse. The naming of oppression that is critical to knowledge creation is exhausting, and often drains participants of the necessary energy and commitment to translate gains into action. Ideally, however, TE results in social action and community development for and by participants.

My model of TE provides a framework for understanding contexts of engagement that speak to the unique needs and realities of all girls, not just the privileged few. These four intersecting strategies work concomitantly to animate, deepen and crystallize minority girls' agency in both private and public realms. They are essential to sustaining girls' investment in an extremely demanding collaborative participatory process, and they guide how TE is facilitated, experienced, and actualized. It is also important to clarify that the processes of crossing borders, building community, expanding knowledge, and engaging in action operate dialogically and must be present at some point for TE to be fruitful; lack of attention in one area can paralyze the entire process of TE. For example, transgenerational relationships among girls, young women, and women do not de facto

lead to social change, nor does critical consciousness in itself produce access to exclusive institutions.

Conclusion

In this first phase of my Interpretive Spiral Model, I have provided a compositional overview of my conceptualization of TE, situating the concept in relation to debates about girls' agency, participation, and citizenship. I have argued that the problematic positioning of minority girls amid these growing debates requires a careful and critical review. Despite their identified capacities and commitment to being involved, minority girls' experiences of disengagement become entrenched by their ambiguous citizenship and systemic social exclusion.

My analysis of the four intersecting strategies of TE illustrates how girls develop creative alternative strategies for engagement in this context of what I have termed 'structural disengagement.' Psychological representations of agency do not account for girls' complex interactions with issues of identity and social belonging. Racialized minority girls must struggle for their civic participation in an increasingly diverse geo-socio-cultural-political reality in which "various counter paradigms deny sociohistorical impacts on girls' capacity to form social belonging, and in which the epistemological fiction of a homogeneous, decontextualized subject prevails" (Harris, 2001, p. 6). The conditions under which TE emerges must be carefully contextualized in relation to both historical footprints and local realities, which create different trajectories for girls' citizenship making and different barriers to their engagement. Ways are urgently needed to form citizenship outside of dominant discourses and to center subjugated knowledges so as to contest the limited citizenship and depoliticization of racialized girls and women.

In the following chapters, I move into the middle loop⁴⁸ of my ISM and problematize our struggles to trouble borders of exclusion, build communities of belonging, develop critical knowledge, and support social action in a continuously evolving and fragile research space opened up by feminist iterations of PAR and PT.

⁴⁸ The fracturing, counter, and historicized analyses.

CHAPTER 11: BORDER CROSSING PRAXIS IN COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

This chapter is concerned with borders and their intersections, crossings, and transgressions. It is not enough to map the contours of dominant borders; we need strategies to redraw them. Redrawing boundaries demands new kinds of interruptive practices. A praxis of border crossing is a praxis of talking back, pushing through, taking up, recounting, rupturing, stretching. In a context where social services, spaces, discourses, and institutional practices deny or minimize the needs and experiences of racialized minority girls, border crossing is hard work. It must be planned, facilitated, nurtured, and evaluated with painstaking sensitivity. Throughout the design and implementation of our study, our team wrestled with how the girls could use research to redefine the borders that so intimately manage their everyday lives, by crossing into exclusive spaces and accessing knowledge, skills, community, and leadership on their own terms.

The transformative impacts of “It’s About Us” were bolstered by our strategic efforts to disturb and transgress exclusionary borders. Our process created and amplified pathways into and across contexts, including access to institutional and community spaces, to social belonging and peer groups, to training and resources, to leadership and advocacy opportunities, to policy development, to tools for knowledge production and dissemination, and to sociocultural capital. It is important to stress, however, that the success of transformative methodologies cannot be measured solely by the degree to which the Other has access to means of doing research, producing knowledge, and building community. Contrary to liberal notions, more than access is needed to create the conditions for equality (hooks & Raschka, 2004). What must also be considered are the challenges inherent in disturbing deeply entrenched relations of power. Those who cross

borders face a potential backlash and resistance, and they require support once they cross. Particularly for marginalized girls who struggle to redefine rigid boundaries on their own terms, border crossing can be overwhelming and destabilizing, with unexpected consequences.

In the first section of this chapter, I focus on the shifting contexts and dilemmas we faced in facilitating the girls' border crossing within the micropractices of research design and logistics. In the second section, I problematize discussions of border crossing at the macro level of policy change, knowledge creation, and community development.

Planning for Border Crossing: Logistical, Procedural, and Design Considerations

The tremendously involving PAR process requires clear guidelines, flexible but concrete boundaries and group process, and a solid logistical foundation. Through trial and error, and within a limited time frame and budget, our team developed strategies for negotiating the logistical and administrative complexities of girls' participation in community-based research (CBR). We had to be particularly cognizant of barriers facing girls who are legally defined as minors, since this status structures their access to research and to modes of knowledge production and social change.

Recruitment

Recruitment is often the first gate that potential research participants contend with. Recruitment and selection procedures shape access to epistemic spaces and research benefits by determining how and by whom knowledge is produced, whose needs and experiences are addressed, who reaps the rewards, and what claims can be made about research outcomes and applications. The girls who agreed to participate in the project shared a common experience of our exploratory focus groups, but their interests, skills, and experiences ranged widely. The recruitment was informal: We approached girls who had expressed an interest in pursuing the project themes and/or in working with us and who

seemed able to commit to, and to benefit from, the extensive process of community development through popular theatre. Some of their comments follow:

Well, you [Eugenie] called me, you told me I would be good at it and we would be getting paid. I was interested in the topic and then the money helped. (Jillien)

Taisha actually invited me, I saw how amazing it was in the ICA theatre project and I wanted to be involved, so I knew it would be good. (Prisha)

I got involved with Sandrina, the whole thing starting with the focus groups, the theatre, the conference, everything. (Taisha)

Eugenie: What did Sandrina say that interested you?

Not like, "I want you to do this," but giving me good opportunities in my life, so whatever she tells me, I know it's a good thing, it's an advantage for me for my career, on my résumé and just experience. It wasn't about the money part, I like coming here. (Taisha)

The other girls laugh, saying, "Yeah, come on!" as Taisha protests:

No, seriously, I would come if you didn't pay me, it's the opportunity to be involved and to volunteer. (Taisha)

As incentives, we offered training certificates, school-friendly assessments the girls could use to earn extra academic credits, honoraria, and reference letters. The opportunity to develop marketable skills and to access professional and career mentoring was identified by the girls as an important benefit of their participation. For example, Barbara felt that the project would help her to "take the next step" in her life, while Evelyn shared that she thought it would guide her in making decisions about "where [she] want[ed] to go" and give her "important skills for finding a job." Jillien stated:

The project will give me something to put on my résumé, to say I worked on a UVic project is a big deal, it sounds professional. (Jillien)

The girls also expressed an interest in creating a forum for advocacy with other girls like themselves, as well as with their broader communities. Prisha, for example, anticipated:

being in the community, talk[ing] about who we are, reach[ing] out to girls like us [who] don't think anybody would understand their situation.

I was really interested in this project because we've been talking about doing something just for girls like this for so long, just something just for girls like us to share our experiences and support each other. (Taisha)

I first got involved in this project through ICA.... I thought it would be a great opportunity to do something positive around the issues like racism and the stereotypes that people have about us. (Jillien)

In general, the girls who agreed to participate were enthusiastic about the project and were willing to become involved as peer leaders and community advocates. They saw the project as providing a range of opportunities, including access to skills and training, to community networks and peers, and to economic and professional resources.

Factors Affecting Access

Engaging girls in a long-term, sustainable research and community development process is particularly challenging, both because adolescent girls do not fully control their own lives and because their identities and realities are rapidly developing and changing. The girls' availability was mediated by a number of personal, developmental, sociocultural, and economic factors. These included their readiness and commitment to participate; the state of their support networks, such as family and friends' ability to support their involvement in the project; and their other commitments, such as school, work, child care, and community involvement.

You have to be motivated and you have to want to be there. And tell them, if you want to do this, maybe you will have to make sacrifices in your lives. (Taisha)

Sandrina: What sacrifices did you have to make?

Well, I have a responsibility at the same time as the research. A lot of things were happening in my family at the same time and I wasn't really giving much help with my family and not helping them at home. (Manjeet)

You have to be like, committed. You have to be there. Make sure you'll be there for it. It's kind of like when you sign up for work, for a job right? (Taisha)

Due to their status as minors, the girls' participation was contingent not only upon their desire or commitment: Their schedules were often unpredictable and their access was affected by people—typically parents, caregivers, and other family members—and external factors over which they did not have direct control. I observed that parents and caretakers used engagement and disengagement strategically to structure the girls' commitments and social relations within and outside the project. For example, if one of the girls was not adequately juggling her school performance or family expectations, her parents would tell her she could not attend rehearsals. Conversely, if the project seemed to be progressing well and she was meeting her other commitments, the parents would allow her to stay late to practice or would make additional efforts to drive her to sessions. It was crucial that our provisions for recruitment build on the girls' existing relationships, including those with extended family and community affiliations. Evelyn, who was 14 and who participated with her older cousin Barbara, relayed the importance of peer mentoring and supports for creating safety and familiarity for herself and her family:

If Barbara was not a part of it, like a role model, I wouldn't be here. I like having someone I know. I'd feel really, sort of, uncomfortable at the beginning, to just come alone, because I'm not that person, not that outgoing. Anyway my parents wouldn't let me, if they don't know the people. (Evelyn)

The girls who completed the project contended with their family, school, peer, and community responsibilities; this juggling act sometimes surfaced dilemmas related to participation and access. For example, one girl's schedule was entirely dependent upon her role as a primary caregiver to her younger sibling, which we all agreed superseded any research commitments. The group accommodated her schedule as much as possible, but the precarious nature of her involvement was frustrating for the research team, the girl, and her family; compromise was often required so that she could attend events and rehearsals. In one of the program evaluations, this participant noted:

It was such a stress for me sometimes to ask my parents again to help me to attend these rehearsals, and then I have to take the bus and my sister has to be taken care

of, and I also have school work and my job, so yeah, sometimes it felt like it was too hard to manage. Sometimes I definitely felt like quitting. I got support from the group so they were patient with me to see if they could see me through that.

The significance of building trust and collaborative relationships between the girls and their families and other support networks cannot be overemphasized. We provided families, caretakers, and, if relevant, schools and other institutions involved in the girls' lives with information about the project in the form of certificates, letters of introduction and support, personal phone calls and visits, and invitations to attend events and information meetings. These measures helped to bring families and friends on board to support the girls as they met the challenges of the project.

Liability and Accountability

Notions of liability and accountability, particularly as they are conceptualized in academic research standards, in many ways contradict efforts to ensure access to and equal participation in participatory research. In our design, efforts to amplify access sometimes conflicted with ethical, legal, and institutional constraints around working with girls who are legally considered minors. As adults we were responsible for the girls ethically and legally, so our research design included provisions for liability, safety, disclosures, reporting, and follow-up (e.g., with girls who required referrals to counselling or other social services). Informed consent was central to the process of sharing information with the girls' personal networks. It was crucial that updates be coordinated through the girls and for the girls to have control over how, when, and which parts of their personal information and achievements were shared. Exceptions to confidentiality, and the legal and ethical implications of disclosures and reporting related to abuse, harm, and risk, were made clear from the start to both the girls and their parents/guardians. We revisited our guidelines for safety, liability, and reporting with the girls throughout the different stages of the project.

Informed Consent

Because PAR is participant led and continuously evolving, we required flexible, transparent, and systematic processes to establish ongoing consent at every stage of the research. Every time our group made a new decision (e.g., introducing a research tool, or participating in a community event), we had to renegotiate informed consent and reclarify the purposes of the research. We employed several procedures for establishing evolving consent, including discussions with the girls, redefining the project objectives, creating new consent forms, updating parents and guardians about changes to the schedules and to the nature of the girls' involvement, using evaluative tools, and documenting all facets of participation for use in reference letters.⁴⁹

Because of the personally involving nature of the research, our conversations about informed consent often seemed tedious to the girls; they were so focused on the relationships, activities, and outcomes of the project that they often forgot we were doing research and systematically collecting data.

Sandrina: How did you feel about being videotaped, being sketched and us taking notes for the project, so we could write about what was happening?

We just got used to it, it's fine. (Barbara)

Yeah, yeah, no problem, we'll do it ... I didn't really care. (Evelyn)

Yeah, it was fine. (Prisha)

This laissez-faire attitude towards consent is, in part, a measure of trust rather than apathy. However, in order that the girls be truly empowered to make decisions in their own best interests, we were purposefully explicit and methodical in addressing informed consent. At the same time, we tried to ensure that the process was engaging (i.e., not so formulaic that the girls 'checked out') without being so informal that

⁴⁹ We also submitted several amendments to our ethics application to the university Human Research Ethics Board.

boundaries were blurred and potential risks trivialized. Asking concrete, open-ended questions helped to clarify expectations and flag potential problems concerning the continuously evolving nature of consent. For example, asking “How would you feel if your parents or friends at school saw this videotape or the poem you posted on the website?” yielded a more revealing conversation than asking the girls if they consented to posting or disseminating materials they had produced.

Honoraria

Honoraria for time-bound research projects are relatively straightforward to negotiate (i.e., you attend a focus group, you receive X amount) but in open-ended, organic projects, they are much more complex. It is difficult in any participatory group process to assess and compare the level and quality of individual participants’ contributions. Further, when participants are personally involved in the development and outcomes of the project, and where many layers of involvement (e.g., roles of participant, researcher, volunteer, community activist) overlap in sometimes ambiguous ways, embedded power inequities surface.

Of all the logistical aspects of the project, the honoraria caused the greatest contention within our team, as they quickly became a barometer for the quality and frequency of the girls’ contributions to the project. The honoraria amount was set at \$200 for completion of the project, and Leila and Lili each received a smaller amount for their participation in the initial stages. The girls devised a system of self-accountability that included penalties and rewards: Their honoraria would be increased if they attended practices or events and reduced if they missed them without legitimate reasons, with a bonus for girls who completed the entire program. This policy resulted in comparisons and questioning of the guidelines which the adults were required to resolve (e.g., “Why did she get \$20 more than I did even though my excuse seemed as valid as hers?”). We learned the benefit of clarifying expectations and consequences as concretely as possible

from the onset of the project and providing ample opportunities for constructive, peer-led evaluations and for adult feedback to justify decisions.

These complicated dynamics were embedded in the broader, less negotiable power relations that permeate collective research projects. For example, although the girls developed their own guidelines for distribution of the honoraria, the principal investigator ultimately controlled the research budget and allocations. The budget was further managed institutionally by University of Victoria administrators, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) research guidelines, and, most importantly, by the university Human Research Ethics Board (HREB). Although we had initially proposed a much larger honorarium, the HREB requested that it be lowered so it would not be perceived as a coercive inducement. As a result, the economic benefits of the research were shared in starkly unequal ways: Our implementation of 'meaningful participation,' although transparent, malleable, and negotiable in many instances, was ultimately regulated by forces outside the girls' control. Despite our common experiences, the women's age and class locations afforded us privileged access to institutional power, economic resources, and tools for knowledge production and advocacy; this, in turn, produced different experiences of gendered racism in comparison to the girls. In research that seeks to unsettle monolithic representations of the impact of gender and race formations in girls' and women's lives, we must diligently specify how different social locations unequally shape vulnerability, agency, and engagement in knowledge production.

Despite the struggles associated with the honoraria, including my own desire to provide more compensation to the girls than we did, offering the honoraria, references, and certificates had two benefits: it simulated an employment experience that the girls could add to their résumés, and it promoted project ownership and professionalization through a scaffolding of increased skills and responsibilities. For instance, over the life of the project,

some of the girls progressed from being members of the research team to becoming community organizers, Anti-dote board members, and fully paid staff.

Constraints on Border Crossing

Documenting the circumstances under which participants leave a project, while it must be balanced with a need to respect confidentiality and consent, is as valuable and necessary as highlighting project successes. Such a discussion opens up opportunities to honour the full spectrum of participation, interrogate areas of contention in our research design, and document the ways in which access to research is shaped by girls' social locations.

Two girls, Leila and Lili, left the project within the first six weeks.⁵⁰ Leila, the 14-year-old Canadian-born daughter of a Muslim Egyptian father and a Catholic Polish mother, describes herself as 'mixed race' and 'mixed religions.' Leila was actively involved in the ICA immigrant group, the "Voices Heard" theatre project, and our exploratory focus groups. A month into the "It's About Us" project, Leila moved out of her parents' home; she then struggled to keep up with her home schooling and community service hours. The pressures of the project became unmanageable, and she voluntarily left the project. I remained her youth worker for almost a year, a situation that underscored how my multiple, overlapping roles in many of the girls' lives created layered and sometimes conflicting contexts of engagement that affected my approach to our study, as I discuss below.

Lili, 14, had moved to Canada from Vietnam with her family when she was five. She described her family as "one of the boat people families." At the time of the project, Lili was in foster care; she participated with the permission of her foster parent and support

⁵⁰ By the time they left, Leila and Lili had made valuable contributions to the content of our skits, and they both consented to having their contributions remain in the production.

worker. Within a few weeks, it became clear that the project was not a good fit for Lili. She struggled to stay focused during the activities, often showed up late or not at all, and had difficulty working with other team members. The other girls became increasingly frustrated with her. After much consideration and numerous discussions with Lili that resulted in little change, we asked her to leave the project. She continued to access ICA's youth program and completed another theatre project that was not research-based. Again, our continued relationship raised questions about my responsibilities as a researcher.

We learned several lessons from these experiences. First, the process and outcomes of TE are strongly mediated by age. As fourteen-year-olds, Leila and Lili required a different process from the older girls, including more personal guidance and structured mentoring. It is no coincidence that Evelyn is the only 14-year-old who completed the project; she was only able to do so because she was supported by her older cousin Barbara. Second, had the gap in age between Leila and Lili and the other girls not been compounded by their difficult life circumstances, it is much more likely that we could have mediated it successfully.

In terms of the girls' life challenges, we as a research team had neither the mandate nor the capacity to intervene. Nonetheless, their departure was difficult for everyone, and it highlighted both concerns about exclusionary access and the stark boundaries between research ethics and community accountability. Here, we experienced first-hand that while some borders are malleable and more easily disturbed, others remain almost impenetrable. This lesson highlights critical questions: How are girls from less privileged or stable backgrounds who do not have the necessary supports to participate excluded from research? What happens to their voices and perspectives? What are our responsibilities as researchers, when we live in the community and continue to engage and work with the girls as professionals or community members? In what ways are we also accountable to parents and families? None of these questions is addressed by current ethical guidelines that neatly

separate research responsibilities from personal relationships and that assume a detached, impartial researcher and an ahistorical, even playing field for all participants. These guidelines are not helpful with the ethical and relational dilemmas often encountered by researchers who are deeply entwined with their own communities—particularly those like me, who wear additional hats as practitioners.

From Planning for Border Crossing to Implementation

Girls' ability to border cross is cumulative and consequently must be deliberately planned for well in advance of starting a project. Although the strategies for recruitment, research design, and logistics that I have described are relatively straightforward, the list is not exhaustive, and challenges arise in their implementation that can significantly impact the project's success. Provisions for the scaffolding of individuals' participation (e.g., progressing from participating in sessions, to facilitating them, to planning and coordinating them) must be embedded in research designs and budgets. Without these community- and capacity-building steps, the principles of PAR remain theoretical, with no practical means to negotiate what participants' TE means on a day-to-day basis.

Facilitating Border Crossing During the Implementation Phase

In this section, I discuss how the evolving TE process amplified access and border crossing beyond the micropractices of research to the macro level, enabling sustainable transformations in communities, institutions, and policy.

Crossing into Spaces for Counter Work

The girls consistently expressed a need to build community capacity on their own terms, outside of the dominant paradigms of girls' agency and engagement. To do so, they required physical, social, and emotional epistemic spaces for counter work, sites in which counter stories could flourish and in which their unique concerns about social exclusion, belonging, placelessness, multiple identities, and ambiguous citizenship could be safely and

critically explored. Counter spaces or sites, as noted by Harris, Carney, and Fine (2001), expose “fissures in highly regulated spaces” (p. 11). Unsettling exclusionary borders to access spaces, resources, training, and community is essential to consolidate power, to nurture oppositional consciousness, and to investigate opportunities for change.

To provide a safe space for counter work, we first had to facilitate access to the research space itself. Every week, we contacted the girls through phone calls and email updates to check in and plan for upcoming sessions. We provided gas and parking money to Barbara, Evelyn, and Manjeet, who had access to a family car, and rides and bus tickets to Jillien, Taisha, and Prisha, who did not. Shared rides provided opportunities to build relationships outside of the hectic demands of the project; they were also an important strategy in a smaller city where access between neighbourhoods is not equalized by public transit as it is in bigger cities—a reality that underlines how consequential locality can be in shaping access to research.

I totally appreciated that they picked us up and drove me home all the time, I was like ‘wow they’re so nice and they really care about me’ because they could just have given me a bus ticket ... to have time to like check in and talk. (Taisha)

I wouldn’t do this if I had to take like 3 buses, the first sessions I thought, oh this sucks, it takes me forever to get there, the other girls all have their own cars or whatever, nice rides, and I have to spend like 2 extra hours just to get there. (Jillien)

Location also had affected the girls’ relationship to exclusive spaces. Since they had requested a central location, we held our initial sessions at ICA, our downtown partner agency. However, after meeting at the University of Victoria on a few occasions, the girls were impressed by the sense of status and professionalism they felt the university afforded them, and they began to envision themselves as part of its community.

It was easier to get to ICA but I liked UVic better. The community center was like any other program we could be in. (Taisha)

UVic felt way more professional, I liked it because I could see myself studying there, that’s where I want to go. We would be taken more seriously. (Barbara)

I never really saw myself at the university, but coming here makes me feel important. It feels more serious. I walk around here, I can totally see myself being here and taking classes. It's kind of exciting! (Prisha)

On one hand, the girls' statements reflect the deeply ingrained sense of inferiority they held about 'their' spaces (i.e., "the community center was like any other program we could be in") in relation to the status and privilege they perceived they would gain by crossing into a dominant White space. On the other hand, it is a testament to the success of the project that young racialized girls who feel excluded from academia can envisage, with excitement and pride, a university experience that reflects their cultural contexts. This perceptual border crossing is significant in light of research that demonstrates the negative impact of racism on minority youth's levels of enrollment and achievement in postsecondary education.⁵¹ Given that racialized minority and Indigenous girls and women remain underrepresented among University of Victoria students, staff, and faculty, the girls' aspirations to cross over into the exclusive space of the university community as future students holds potential for building critical mass and transforming a predominantly White institutional landscape.⁵²

Like the girls, the women team members felt affirmed by the experience of disrupting academic borders of knowledge production, demonstrating that TE extends to adult researchers. Typically within academic institutions, Indigenous and racialized minority women do not have the access to 'socio-academic capital' (informal relationships, sharing of experiences, networks of mentors, innate knowledge of cultural realms, etc.) that academics need to negotiate research successfully and from their unique perspective. Participation in minority-only research teams is rare and holds significant

⁵¹ See, for example, Castles, Booth, and Wallace, 1984; James, 1990, in Kaspar & Noh, 2001; Ogbu 1995.

⁵² In fact, three of the girls—now young women—are currently University of Victoria students.

potential for transforming our subjective experiences into legitimate knowledge and practices of research.

Building Communities of Belonging

The creation of a cohesive and supportive peer group played a key role in interrupting the social isolation that many of the girls experienced in their communities, schools, and neighbourhoods. Having few formal opportunities to network with other minority girls made it difficult for them to develop the necessary critical language and consciousness to assert oppositional agency. In a personal essay, Allison (1994) describes the cost of the systemic erasure of girls of colour from public consciousness: “When I first came here I was so ashamed to be South Asian, I was not anywhere, not in books, not on TV, not in movies, not in music ... no matter how hard I tried to squeeze myself in” (p. 18). Similarly, the girls in our project expended a tremendous amount of time and energy struggling with issues of erasure and belonging. Many of them initially expressed excited disbelief that they would have the opportunity to create meaningful and supportive linkages with other minority girls. The rhetoric of Victoria as ‘Canada’s Little England’ was so embedded in their consciousness that they could not imagine that other girls like them also struggled with living on the margins of Whiteness.

When they said there would be this project for girls like us, I was like “Wow, there’s other girls like me? Is anyone gonna show up?” I didn’t think there would be, because I know who everyone is where I live and we all know who the other Muslim girls are. I was surprised to meet other Muslim girls I didn’t know, it was so cool. (Prisha)

I didn’t even think there would be other girls like me, it was a total shock, I was so excited, I made friends really quick. It was a completely different environment that was so multicultural. (Jillien)

The girls were surprised and relieved to discover the multiple points of commonality that emerged as they began to name and deconstruct their assumptions. The strong relational bonds that developed through the focus groups and theatre process

enabled them to explore and share aspects of their lived realities that they had suppressed or hidden for strategic survival reasons. What is most significant in this community-building process is the act of creating shared consciousness with peers, which the girls experienced as healing and empowering.

I just felt good to meet other girls who go through the same, just to know you're not the only one. It's so hard to go through stuff like that alone. (speaker unclear)

I got some things off my chest and sharing it was really good, to not feel alone, like you're going through it by yourself. (Prisha)

Yeah, to see there are people out there who do see what you see and feel, what you feel and most importantly, we all opened up to each other in that sense, so now we have a place to share that. (Manjeet)

What seemed most critical to the girls' empowerment and healing process was our deliberate creation of a safe 'minority/Indigenous-only' space where their experiences were normalized and honoured rather than censored or discounted.

Yeah, there were no Whites, I liked how we were all of colour. (Evelyn)

Yeah, they understood where I was coming from, like all the stuff we talked about, being alone. They don't question it. (Taisha)

We don't get to talk about being Muslim here [Victoria], it's great to have a space to do that ... I liked pretty much everything because it's good to be able to express yourself, we got to talk about a lot of our personal experiences, and it is great to meet and listen to others who have been through it too. (Prisha)

The opportunity to network and build critical mass helped the girls to create resonance between their multiple worlds and to challenge their representation as disengaged, pathologized, or irrevocably outside the norm. The transformative process of engagement provided the foundation for these girls to develop tools to conscientize other girls, engendering another layer of transformation.

Crossing into Other Girlhoods

As the project progressed, the girls' friendships quickly transcended the borders of the research, spilling out into their—and their families'—lives. The girls began exchanging

phone calls and instant messages and ‘hanging out’ together on weekends; we would hear about their adventures during our sessions. A significant outcome of these friendships was that they enhanced the girls’ ability to navigate borders between, among, and across their backgrounds and communities, in that process eroding ossified representations of ‘racialized minority girls.’ Despite their common experiences of living under Whiteness, the girls experienced global cultural shifts—and their identities as diasporic, transnational, racialized minorities—in very different ways. In the course of our group discussions, we heard a lot about the horizontal racisms that permeated their daily lives, bringing to the surface historical tensions within and among Victoria’s ethnocultural communities.

For instance, Prisha often commented that since her mother was Kurdish-Iranian, she was not considered “100% Persian” by some of her family members, nor by members of Victoria’s Persian community. Evelyn and Barbara expressed that they were proud to be from Hong Kong rather than from mainland China, because it afforded them instant upper-class status, especially when travelling to a larger city like Vancouver. Jillien also shared her struggles with measures of Asian authenticity; when she first joined the group, she worried that the other girls would perceive her as a “fake minority” because she was “so whitewashed” and “not Asian enough to belong in this group.” For her part, Manjeet described how hierarchies within the local Sikh community managed her social relationships with other Sikh girls; she and her friends were proud that they were not “this other kind” of Sikh, the less integrated, newly immigrated ‘FOBs’ (fresh off the boat). Manjeet and her friends wore their Canadian identity as a badge of honour that distinguished them from their less cosmopolitan peers, underscoring their internalized lateral racism and biased perception of Indians.

The girls were obviously strategic in reading and coding markers of citizenship such as skin colour, accent, and level of assimilation into mainstream Canadian society. They understood that these codes positioned them within asymmetrical relations of power,

and they policed their own standing through discourses of difference, belonging, Otherness, and authenticity. These 'politics of recognition' were also monitored heavily by the girls' parents and communities. For example, one of the girls shared how surprised her parents had been to see Taisha, who is Ethiopian-Canadian, come to their home:

They had never really like spent time with a Black person before really, not in their house or really close. And for sure, you know, you see they're racist like that, they were raised with it. Even if this project is about that, racism, they still have it, they would kill me if I dated like someone really dark or like a Muslim or like a Vietnamese or something like that. They like a good Chinese guy for me. Hong Kong all the way.

This quote illustrates the ways in which transnational and diasporic communities travel with constructions of Otherness and reconstitute racial hierarchies within Canada's 'multicultural' mosaic. Despite Victoria's lack of ethnocultural diversity, these constructions are enacted between communities, families, and individuals to negotiate and circulate multiple racisms, borders of belonging and exclusion, measures of authenticity, and historical relationships with other communities. Kaplan, Alarcon, and Moallem (1999) warn against our desire to privilege subaltern experiences as natural sites of solidarity and transgression, arguing that the 'borderlands' are not equally accessible, assimilable, or equivalent, nor does embodying them assume coherence or even critical consciousness. Taisha's 'reading' by Evelyn's parents, for example, demonstrates that while some girls could more easily move much across categories, others were more vulnerable to multiple racisms. The example also emphasizes that lateral friendships (i.e., those between girls of different ethnocultural communities) are constructed as wasteful: In terms of dominant discourses about girls' citizenship making and civic participation, such friendships do not advance social status or Canadian identity, nor are they perceived to solidify membership in one's own community or enhance that community's sociocultural capital.

These tensions, although they permeate the girls' daily lives, typically remain unrecognized in a predominantly White city like Victoria where they are carefully managed

by dominant discourses of multiculturalism and where authentic ethnic differences are flattened to fit into state-sanctioned stereotypes of difference. The girls had access to few complex, nuanced, viable representations of these tensions. As Manjeet observes:

It's like that because we live in Victoria, I'm sure. If you go to Vancouver or something, it's totally different. I was just there... I noticed that my cousins and stuff only hang out with other people of our culture so they are not different. They are all the same. So which one is worse? Living here or living there? There's racism on both sides, it's just different. Here it's Whites in the majority so we suffer more. There [Vancouver] it's the community against itself and against the other communities or whatever, it's more inside. (Manjeet)

Manjeet's comments demonstrate that the girls lacked contexts where the many paradoxes in the ways they viewed each other and their respective communities could be voiced, theorized, and politicized as sites of struggle, contingency, and potential solidarity. Our research team invested a lot of time in teasing out the effects of locality in shaping the girls' struggles with fluid, scattered racisms subsumed under monolithic discourses of diversity. These discussions provided the foundation for the skit "Curry Rice," which is discussed in the following chapter.

While the relationships developed during the course of the project did not, of course, completely address or resolve the many examples of parallel and horizontal racisms, they provided room for the girls to complexify their experiences and to construct themselves outside of colonial representations of Otherness—even those that existed, to some degree, within the research team itself. These benefits extended to our research space, deepening our discussions and increasing the levels of safety, sharing, commitment, and enthusiasm. The process of TE was strengthened by the girls' peer-to-peer mentoring, which allowed them to develop their conflict resolution and facilitation skills to deal with a range of issues and conflicts.

I learned how to deal with conflict because we had to make it work, I didn't want to walk out when things didn't work so we had to work it out as a group.⁵³

I think my relationship with the other girls is good, we got really close over time.

My relationships with the other girls in the group, we're really good. I'm pretty anti-social, the girls really got me comfortable and open, they talked to me when I thought they wouldn't. They are people I'm going to contact for a long time.

The girls also modeled the development of relational skills across hierarchies of difference to their friends and families:

I learned so much about another culture, like I had all my stereotypes and stuff like that, now I am more aware of it, like I will correct other people, my friends or whatever, if they say something that is wrong. I'm like 'I know that's not true!' (Barbara)

Here again is evidence that the girls' direct experience with coalition and community building, facilitation, and dispute resolution across sites of difference and struggle was crucial to developing the research and community development skills that they would require to work effectively toward social, policy, and institutional change.

Crossing into Policy and Institutional Change

As the project progressed, the girls became increasingly aware that their wellness and development were enmeshed in adults' discourses about them, as well as in the policies and institutions that were developed to support—at least in theory—their integration into full citizenship. Our analytical process provided the girls with tools to speak back to the dominant 'at-risk girls' discourse by exposing some of the policy and institutional fissures that limited their sense of engagement. During an interactive mapping activity, they listed the predominant barriers they face in school. These include:

- No representation of other cultures in high school curriculum
- Lack of support for ESL students

⁵³ These quotes are drawn from one of our final debrief sessions and the speakers were not identified in the transcript.

- Stereotypes about visible minorities (e.g., Asians have money)
- Stress/anxiety/depression unique to minority girls, identity issues, jokes around skin colour (e.g., ‘chinx,’ the ‘N’ word)
- Misrepresentation of minority voices in schools
- ‘Wannabe’ people who want to be ‘ethnic’ because it’s cool
- Becoming ‘whitewashed’—losing culture in White Victoria
- Tensions between Canadian-born and immigrant leadership, tension between ‘Whites’ and ‘Natives’
- Feeling of being the only coloured student
- Being different with ‘White’ friends than with friends of their own culture

These powerful examples demonstrate how the girls must struggle every day for their social inclusion and engagement. Within their own schools, they experience systemic racism, a pervasive sense of invisibility, curriculum embedded in colonial representations of the Other, institutional practices that deny them sociocultural capital, unbelonging, and powerful pressure to negate and immerse themselves in dominant Whiteness in order to fit in. In such contexts, the grounds for political self-redefinition are struggled for through physical, spiritual, emotional, conceptual, material, and symbolic border crossings. Interventions into the girls’ experiences of ‘stress/anxiety/depression,’ ‘misrepresentation,’ and ‘lack of support’ require that they have access to appropriate resources, girl-centered safe spaces, tools for girl-led advocacy, and language that more fully represents their realities. These provisions go well beyond crisis management and need-based intervention.

Conclusion

Border crossing does not in itself lead to TE; it must be embedded in a broader process of transformation that speaks to the outstanding conceptual, institutional, and material gaps girls must contend with in shaping their practices of engagement. Yet, although girls have been identified as a research, practice, and policy priority, state-sanctioned multicultural discourses that advocate the social inclusion of *all* girls have not yet been translated into meaningful avenues for racialized minority girls' engagement. The problematic positioning of girls of colour amid growing debates about girls' citizenship and participation requires a thoughtful reconceptualization of the experiences and capacities of racialized minority girls. Liberal representations of access as a measure of equity do not acknowledge the courageous steps that are needed to contend with the borders that define minority girls' everyday lives, nor do they speak to the systemic changes that are required to extend transformation beyond the individual or their immediate social circle. Frameworks for girls' TE must account for different histories, localities, and social positionings that create unequal trajectories for girls' citizenship and erect barriers to their engagement.

Accordingly, TE is not only about loading girls with skills but about intervening in the particular spaces and circumstances of their lives. These borders are not impassable. Our own strategies of research and community building amplified their disruption by enhancing the relevance and applicability of skills, knowledge, and community relationships within girls' daily lives, thereby deeply anchoring the outcomes of PAR in their everyday settings.

CHAPTER 12:
BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF BELONGING: RELATIONAL AND
FACILITATIVE CHALLENGES

Relationship Matters

Building communities of belonging requires a deliberate praxis of relationship and reciprocity. Despite their interwoven nature, these threads can get quickly and deeply tangled. The relational stakes are always high in research projects involving difficult counter work and social action. In PAR, as in PT, conscientization, networking, and empowerment depend on the quality of the relationships and the processes of partnership and trust building within the research team. Investing in resilient relationships is neither a methodological indulgence nor a by-product of the research design; rather, it is the driving force in the TE process. Feminist researchers often are challenged, however, by a lack of complexity in how we conceptualize and facilitate relational dilemmas amid multiple layers of interdisciplinarity and the personal, community, and political relationships that are indispensable in CBR. These relational complexities must nonetheless be placed on the table, facilitated in particular ways with specific skills, and supported with sufficient time and resources.

In the previous chapter I described the transformative ‘end result’ of the girls’ movement from border crossing to building community and solidarity. These benefits were not immediate or guaranteed, however. Relational and facilitative hurdles challenged us throughout the study. Our project nearly foundered in its first two months—the critical group-building phase—due to group dynamics. Despite our research team’s extensive professional and personal experience in community settings, we struggled with group process, relationship building, power, solidarity, facilitation, and

organization. These complications uncovered some of the relational and facilitative challenges that frequently permeate high-stakes, high-risk research partnerships.

The challenges and lessons described in this chapter suggest ways to conceptualize, plan, facilitate, and implement quality relationships in feminist CBR. Our experiences raise several critical questions about community building: What kinds of relationships facilitate girls' TE and amplify girls' roles as change agents in contexts of high-risk storytelling? How can PAR and PT provide a vehicle for transgenerational research partnerships that do not exploit or objectify girls further? How can relational practices serve to introduce a structural analysis of girls' experiences that is at once critical and girl-friendly? And, how do we move beyond using relational practice as a panacea for intervening into structural inequity and institutional practices of power and exclusion?

The Intangible Nature of Relationships

Relationships are the primary medium for mitigating the potentially recolonizing and appropriative aspects of CBR. In the words of Saanich Elder Greg Sam (2006) of Tsartlip First Nation:

If you want to research with us, first off you have to sit with us, visit with us: You have to invest in that relationship because you carry us with you when you hear that story ... if it's not done properly, [that can] really be dangerous to our people. It can open that wound again.... So your work has to come from a place of safety ... you have to make sure our stories will be safe, before you move forward.

Sam stresses that it is not enough to attend to reciprocity and transparency in our research designs, processes, and findings. Community-based research requires researchers to be willing to critically locate themselves, to make time for community-paced processes (Ball, 2005), and to put themselves on the line in ways that go well beyond the rhetoric of research ethics and protocols. Kovach (2003) compares relationship building to the process of baking bannock without a recipe. With no exact

recipe to follow, relationships nonetheless develop if we slow down the process, engage with one another's life spaces, and pay attention to the subtleties of interpersonal communication. Quality relationships gather strength from the kind of tacit, intangible knowledge about others that can only accumulate through building trust over time, or, as Kovach explains, "because you have been there *with* them, often" (p. 14). The girls in "It's About Us" describe similarly straightforward requirements of quality relationships: Pay attention. Respect. Reciprocate. Be there. Spend the time. Listen. *Really* listen.

Yeah, we won't even make it if we can't work together, there's no communication. (Jillien)

At the start what wasn't working was listening to us, not just focusing on how good the thing will be, we're not even taking time to know each other. (Manjeet)

Our group was good because you can just relax and you know you can be yourself because they listen to what you go through. (Taisha)

The best part of the theatre project was meeting you guys! It made me want to keep going even when things got really stressed out. (Barbara)

The girls' comments underscore how critical quality relationships were to how and why they remained engaged. Taisha relays the importance of effective relationships both for "getting her through" a demanding research process and for creating spaces of safety and solidarity where personal experiences could be shared, thereby mitigating the impact of social isolation and providing opportunities for a supportive peer group to develop. Manjeet and Jillien emphasize that the quality of relationships is as relevant as "how good the thing will be," implying that poor relationships can invalidate efforts towards broader project goals.⁵⁴ Simply put, without effective relationships, marginalized girls do not become engaged, risk sharing, or participate in demanding, action-based

⁵⁴ Similarly, in a research evaluation of family services, McCroskey and Meezan (1998, cited in Shangreux & Blackstock, 2004) found that the quality of the relationship between workers and families was more critical to success than the length or intensity of the process, the worker caseload, or the type of analysis used.

processes. Relationship is the medium through which other foundational elements of collaborative CBR, such as collaborative knowledge development, shared benefits, and social action, become negotiated and actualized.

Relationships Matter, But How Do We Get There?

The relational building blocks the girls describe seem relatively straightforward. Successful project relationships require sustained, committed participation, skilled facilitation and communication, and functional group dynamics. Yet while there is a strong impetus for 'relationship' across the fields of PAR and PT, and within feminist and youth-led collectives, "the quandary of how to do it persists" (Kovach, 2003, p. 14).

Our experiences bring this quandary into sharp relief. The pivotal role of relationships was particularly salient during the crucial group-building phase, when seemingly straightforward relationship-building principles (e.g., develop collaborative partnerships, reciprocate, build trust, attend to diverse perspectives, focus on strengths) proved difficult to enact. We were unprepared for the tensions that arose as our different perspectives spilled over into our group process, slowly eroding trust, energy, and commitment. Despite having carefully considered potential roadblocks during our planning stages, we nonetheless became fragmented by micropolitics relating to group dynamics, power sharing, accountability, organization, analysis, and epistemology. Within the first month and a half of our project, it became clear that some of our divergent goals and expectations would be difficult to reconcile. Accordingly, we held a series of intensive debriefs and group evaluations, which resulted in significant revisions to our research design. These revisions included reconfiguration of our research team

membership and roles, as well as changes to group dynamics, timelines, theatre methodologies, and facilitation methods.⁵⁵

Working with Theatre: Facilitative and Relational Challenges

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) evolves through a cycle of thematic exploration, analysis, performance, and evaluation. Our first phase of the project involved the introduction of basic theatre games and interactive exercises. We agreed that only the girls would be involved in acting. As theatre director, Susana was the principal facilitator; she directed the sessions and the development of the theatre production. As lead researcher, I coordinated the girls and the sessions in terms of research design and logistics (research planning, documentation, performances, etc.). Eugenie acted as the administrative coordinator; she videotaped the sessions and therefore interacted much less with the girls. Jo-Anne oversaw and guided the project.

Our first session was a full day workshop at the Inter-Cultural Association that combined theatre training with program and research tasks. The girls showed up on time, although a little sleepy, and assessed each other with nervous anticipation, excited to meet and get started. We sat in a circle and shared juice, bagels and fruit. We provided the girls with colourful personal folders containing research information, forms for informed consent, a contract, journals, pens, and bus tickets. Eugenie and I used interactive exercises to facilitate introductions and a discussion of the research design.⁵⁶

After a hot lunch, Susana introduced the girls to the history and premise of TO and facilitated basic theatre exercises and games. Sketches of the exercises are included

⁵⁵ As described in Chapter 5, Leila made the decision to drop out of the project, we decided collectively to ask Lili to leave, and we invited three new girls, Prisha, Barbara, and Evelyn. Susana stepped down as primary theatre facilitator and took on the role of performance consultant, and I took over as theatre facilitator.

⁵⁶ This discussion included describing the research design, establishing informed consent, developing contracts and group guidelines, developing our schedule for meetings, planning logistics and transportation, and discussing outcomes, goals, and expectations.

as Appendix 2. As the images depict, Susana guided the girls in exploring the room, moving and freezing their bodies into different poses, and slowly building comfort with their own bodies and each other. Participatory exercises of this nature are always emotionally and physically demanding, particularly for girls who are engaging with each other for the first time and using their bodies and voices to depict sensitive issues. As early as this first session, however, it was apparent that we would face additional challenges. Specifically, tensions arose between the girls and Susana that threw our approach into question and jeopardized our group dynamics.

In the following sections, I explore several of the most salient issues underlying the deteriorating relationship, including divergent approaches to PT and transformative research, dynamics between participants, methodological dilemmas in the application of popular theatre (PT), differing expectations for working with girls, and a lack of preparation and organization on the part of the research team. I want to emphasize that this chapter contains sensitive and potentially contentious data and represents only my interpretation. I focus specifically on my interpretation of the relationship between the girls and Susana because her role was crucial in the first phase and because she does not appear in data beyond the first few months. In other sections and chapters, I attend more fully to the relationships between the girls and other team members, including myself.

Divergent Approaches to Popular Theatre

A point of dissonance was the divergent approaches among our team members to facilitating PT with girls. As the experienced and respected director of her own PT company, Susana based her approach on a traditional model of drama training, in which teacher-student roles are sharply delineated.⁵⁷ As director, Susana was focused on

⁵⁷ In Chapter 7, I described another form of community-based PT in which a director works with a community to develop a play on salient issues; community involvement in the performance takes precedence and constitutes the 'popular' aspect of the process.

performance and outcome; her goal was to develop the girls' acting capacity and to script, stage, and facilitate the skits in order to craft a compelling and transformative performance for the audience. In her words:

The production has to have quality for audiences to relate.... This takes a lot of time and practice and we have to be focused and disciplined for the process to work ... and to inspire audiences.... You have to learn how to be convincing actors, that takes a lot of time and practice.... You have to be really dedicated and take it seriously ... this is a great opportunity.

Conversely, Eugenie and I had explained to the girls when we recruited them that the theatre would be used in a more iterative manner, eliciting their voices and evolving needs as we transformed the findings from the focus groups into a performance. With this expectation, and because they had experienced their previous work with us as interactive and peer-centered, the girls were focused on process and relationships.

We want to bond and develop our group, not just go right into these exercises. You have to build it, create a bond first. (anonymous debrief)

[If] we don't have time to get to know each other, we're not gonna share our stuff. (Prisha)

From the first day, we struggled to balance the two approaches. In my own experiences with youth theatre projects, I had observed that a theatre process, when engaging and respectful, nurtures a sense of ownership and commitment among the participants that infuses every aspect of the project, making for an honest and rousing performance. However, because of Susana's expertise as a theatre director, and because it was expressly her mandate to facilitate the sessions, I initially deferred to her approach. In my observation, the resulting focus on the *product* to the detriment of group dynamics in the theatre *process* detracted from our research goal of nurturing and responding to the girls' engagement and empowerment.

As an example, each theatre session included a 'check-in' circle with snacks and drinks, followed by one-and-a-half to two hours of drama-based games and exercises, and concluding with a 'check-out' and quick evaluation. Ironically, the warm-up exercises,

designed to develop the girls' dramatic abilities and build group cohesion, seemed to prevent discussion, skill development, and trust building.

To say the least, I don't think I gained from any of the training we did at first. I don't see the purpose of throwing a ball up, theatre forms and games, I don't see how it fits. Yeah, it was really bad... When we met up, we'd just warm up and warm up and we weren't getting to the theatre. (Jillien)

The icebreakers, the mirror, I didn't like that, I thought it was boring. A lot of it was time consuming. (Evelyn)

Yeah, the training exercises, I didn't like them. They were boring, I didn't think they related to what we were doing in the end project, we came to talk about these issues and we were just wasting our time. (Manjeet)

The warm-up exercises did not provide a structure for the girls to become more invested and develop leadership; as a result, they were counterproductive in nurturing the girls' engagement and the progression of our analytical goals. Gradually, the girls lost interest. This disengagement was compounded by the fact that girls in this age group tend to possess an acute sense of interpersonal allegiance and fairness. As part of their process of trust building, many of the girls monitored the women for evidence of perceived pretence or 'fraudulence.' Any they detected lent credence in turn to their resistance.

Power Games and Group Dynamics

By the third week of the project, Lili and Leila were really struggling with the demands of the research, and it was becoming evident that they would soon leave our team. Their struggles coincided with our facilitative challenges; as such, we hoped that our group dynamics would improve once the team was reconfigured. However, even with the addition of three new girls—Barbara, Evelyn, and Prisha—and a revised group process, tensions intensified as the weeks went on. At first, they subtly challenged Susana, but over time their resistance became increasingly explicit and defiant. They frequently refused to engage with her exercises, avoided communication and eye contact, scribbled notes and rolled their eyes as she spoke, showed up late, and imitated her when

she left the room. These rehearsals were filled with tension. I often left feeling exhausted, while the girls continued to debrief over email and phone calls, further escalating their sense of frustration. During our debrief discussions, several of the girls complained that Susana's lecturing style was alienating and de-energizing.

She talked way too much. I got lost in her words. (Evelyn)

I didn't understand it, I didn't get the point of what she was talking about.
(Barbara)

I actually zoned out a few times. (Prisha)

In those introductory sessions, the presumed spontaneity and dynamism of theatre did not seem to be conveyed. There were extended periods when the group sat around as Susana explained the history and purpose of TO, providing instruction as each exercise was facilitated and debriefed. In retrospect, we failed to prepare sufficiently for the indeterminate aspects of participatory facilitation and research with girls. Rather than engaging with them 'in the moment' and allowing the drama production to emerge organically from a group-led process of meaning making and critical discovery, Susana directed the development of a production. As a professional director, she invested a lot of time and effort into preparing for the sessions and she seemed taken aback by the girls' resistance. She commented several times that she felt offended by the girls' disrespect and inattentiveness, and she reflected that they seemed to lack the required "dedication and discipline" to produce a successful play. She felt disappointed that the value of the training seemed lost on the girls, whom she thought were "passing up a great opportunity." Nonetheless, the more Susana attempted to bring them into the process, the more the girls resisted.

These tensions are familiar in participatory transgenerational projects. Even experienced facilitators and participants can get caught up in the tug of war between the role of adult expert and holder of knowledge ("why don't they want to learn from us?")

and teenagers' insistence on independence and self-determination ("we won't do what they tell us"). For instance, in their school-based participatory project with girls, Sharon Ravitch (1998) and her colleague had great difficulty understanding and responding to girls' resistance to their prescriptive approach:

The girls had become increasingly disruptive in our meetings.... After several sessions a major turning point occurred when [we] agreed to stop bringing in highly structured activities and try to "just be" with the girls. The sessions following this shift were wonderful! We talked without any formal agenda, laughed, shared stories, and listened to each other. I realized I needed to relinquish my cherished role as leader and transmitter of knowledge and allow us to co-create a more reciprocal relationship based on mutual and appropriate levels of sharing (p. 117).

Echoing Ravitch's experience, the girls in our project wanted a chance to process and analyze experiences in a less prescriptive manner, using relationships rather than procedures as entry points into the PAR and PT process.⁵⁸

It feels too controlled so we can't really be ourselves.

I wanna share but we haven't even built up the trust that we need.

I wanna really go into the issues, have more discussion before the theatre.

It is taking us too long to get to the theatre, we did so many icebreakers and less of the deep talk.

The girls were clearly committed to the process, but they needed our entire team to invest in trust building and collaboration before they would risk engaging in "deep talk," a crucial step in the PAR process of praxis making. Allen (2000) stresses that empowerment does not emerge from the unidirectional appropriation of power through participation, but rather that it must be embedded in a trust-building process:

As a compelling theme, trust is mentioned but not adequately addressed in either health or community development literature which takes it for granted that empowerment is the obvious result of participation. However,

⁵⁸ All quotes are from an anonymous written debrief.

as Inuit emphasized, the ability to trust is both a prerequisite and a goal of the entire participation/empowerment process at all levels (p. 142).

The Authentic Other

One barrier to the trust-building process was the girls' policing of boundaries of legitimacy and authenticity through their inscription of Susana as Other. While Susana identified strongly as a racialized political refugee from South America, the girls had quickly coded her as an older White woman who held power over them.

She's totally White, what does she know about this? (Prisha)

She doesn't really get it. (Barbara)

She's like our teachers. (Evelyn)

These girls' comments reflect their ability to read and code what they perceived to be Susana's privileged Whiteness. They inscribed Susana, like their teachers, as a privileged outsider, someone who would not be able to understand or relate to their experiences. Here is evidence that several of the girls developed and enforced their own strategies of inclusion and exclusion to protect the safety of their 'minority only' space. While these manoeuvres provide evidence of efforts to build a community of belonging, they further alienated Susana from the group. She commented several times that she felt her struggles as a political refugee and her subject location as a racialized minority—a position from which she had based much of her work in PT—were rendered invisible by the girls' reading of her as White.

Here again we see that politics of coalition and community building are provisional and slippery; they are challenged by always shifting, contested codes of authenticity and belonging. In coming together as a research team, we had to resist the yearning to simply assume our unity and commonalities; we questioned the idea that it is possible to unsettle colonial formations through research and practice without acknowledging that we, too, are positioned and shaped within unequal relations of power.

Voice, Silence, and Power

The capacity to read and respond to group dynamics is a crucial skill for PT facilitators, particularly in working with young people. ‘Storming,’ for example—rebelling against established norms as a means of taking ownership—is a normal and indispensable stage in the development of group process. Effective facilitation draws on the creative energy that springs from group tension and from differing goals, skills, and voices. In our group, however, some of the girls perceived that rigid and prescriptive theatre ‘rules’ were used as a way to control and silence them and to thwart their ability to take ownership of the process, as they reflected in this anonymous evaluation.

The facilitator is talking all the time but we don’t get to talk.

She says nobody is supposed to speak in this kind of theatre but she talks the whole time.

I also observed that the girls used voice and silence strategically to engage and disengage, and this overlapped with their unique communication styles. Taisha, Manjeet, Jillien, and Prisha were more extroverted and talkative; Barbara and Evelyn were inclined to observe and participate nonverbally. Each of these styles, if nurtured and engaged, can make important contributions to group projects. However, it is important to recognize the difference between individual communication styles, contemplative silence, and silence that reflects withdrawal, self-censoring, peer pressure, or resistance to either the process or the facilitators. The girls’ questioning of the group rules and process was, in effect, a form of storming and an attempt on their part to develop leadership, accountability, and trust. It was my perception that some of the women were threatened by the storming process, and their efforts to maintain control prompted the girls to push the limits of our established power hierarchies.

Supervising the Girl

The girls' desire for greater control and power highlighted the contradictions in the women's expectations of roles and responsibilities. Our discourse of the girls as empowered, active agents and participants sometimes contradicted a discourse of them as needing to be managed and supervised. Some of the girls commented on the perceived lack of trust in their abilities, admitting that they sometimes felt treated more like young children than high school seniors and co-participants.

The biggest issue is the trust issue, we haven't been given a chance to really get to know each other that well yet, I don't think they trust us.
(Barbara)

It feels like some of the adults treat us girls like little kids, there's not a lot of trust there. (anonymous debrief)

It is understandable to me that these girls expressed both frustration and confusion; they felt that although the women invited them to assume leadership roles, we invested insufficient time in providing direction or space in which to assume these roles.

Girls as Active and Skilled Agents

Both PAR and PT should be grounded in participants' capacities and needs, but in my view some of the women initially underestimated the girls' abilities and readiness. At the first few sessions, Susana dove right into theatre training without providing an opportunity for a thorough inventory of the girls' capacities and interests. Doing so reproduced the very stereotype we had hoped to discount—that girls are vessels needing to be filled with expert knowledge in order to become skilled and critical agents. Although the girls had very different personalities, working styles and levels of experience with theatre and group work, they seemed to agree on this point: The following comments reveal their struggles for recognition of their role as experts of their own issues and ways of knowing—crucial knowledge that was at times completely discounted.

She went on like she had all the answers and we didn't know anything.
But I'm not a little baby. (Evelyn)

She never asked me what we knew about theatre, like we've never done
this, and we've been doing this like all over! (Manjeet)

She thinks she's teaching us something new, but it's pretty basic, pretty
common sense. Figure out the problem, stand up for your rights. (Jillien)

Well, at ICA we did lots of acting. We already have a theatre group and
we were doing popular theatre, so ... I think that if someone is doing
something like this again, they should find out the background of the
person, if they've done theatre. How much theatre everyone has, you
know. Well let's say there are some girls who have done it and others who
haven't, then they can teach the other people what they know. And then
it's like peer helping each other, and basically the adults can cover
everything else. (Taisha)

The girls' reflections exemplify not only their level of sophistication and readiness for
engagement, but a growing confusion about the premise of our methodology. Even
Evelyn and Jillien, who described themselves as very apprehensive about theatre and shy
about public speaking, were frustrated with the pace and focus. What the girls really
wanted was self-determination, the power to facilitate their own process, and access—a
primary theme of my study—to girl-centered language, spaces, and resources.

I can do it if we just move fast and get things done quickly. For example,
when you guys left us it was good and it felt like that's what we needed, to
do things on our own. (Prisha)

[I wanted] more personal discussion and more youth leading the activities.
(anonymous debrief)

[There is a need] for us girls to lead scenes about our own experiences.
(anonymous debrief)

These observations illustrate that while many of the girls had expressed interest in
engaging in a transgenerational mentoring process, they certainly were not passive
recipients of our 'expert' guidance; they exerted agency in deciding how they would
engage, in what capacity they wanted to be mentored, and by whom. They envisaged a
girl-centered peer teaching process of skills and knowledge transfer, with the women

playing a supplemental facilitative role.⁵⁹ However, lacking a framework to more systematically engage the girls' capacities and evolving leadership, we struggled to foster such a process.

Methodological Dilemmas

One unintended pitfall lay in our decision that while all team members were 'researcher-participants,' the UVic adult team members (Jo-Anne, Eugenie, and I) would serve as assistant facilitators and data gatherers rather than as actors. Although this decision was intended to provide epistemic privilege to the girls' voices and experiences, the positioning of the UVic women as ethnographers or 'voyeurs' and the girls as actors or 'agents' created confining silos for participation. Some of the girls read the women's centering of the girls' work and voices as an imposition of power that enabled us to reap the benefits without putting ourselves on the line.

It was like we did the work and they watched us, they helped us and stuff but the pressure was on us. (Manjeet)

Yeah, it was kind of weird because they knew us because they spoke with us or they interviewed us or whatever, but the thing is we didn't really know them as much as they knew us. (Evelyn)

These early decisions shaped the project, influencing how and when relationships would be nurtured, how the process was facilitated, who held power, and how the goals of the project were developed and implemented. Such is the unpredictable nature of FPAR, where even well-intended strategies for equalizing participation can backfire. This speaks to the difficulty of finding balance between facilitating an open-ended, collaborative process and providing enough structure for cohesive methodological planning. In the beginning, as adults we had deliberately avoided imposing a rigid structure and specific analysis onto the girls in order to nurture their leadership and participation. We intended

⁵⁹ This sort of supportive, parallel facilitation role will be familiar to any facilitator who has worked in youth-led projects.

that their voices and needs would organically shape the progression of the project. But with high levels of mistrust and uncertainty regarding the theatre piece, the girls felt overwhelmed by the unpredictable nature of the co-constructed research process. In retrospect, we ought to have interrupted the theatre exercises to supplement with concrete research planning so that the links between the theatre and the research goals could be clarified as they emerged during the theatre sessions.

The need to incorporate more explicit research analysis into the theatre sessions also surfaced disagreements about the place of verbal debriefing in PT. Susana explained to the group that interrupting the exercises to debrief at length would counteract an important premise of TO, which prioritizes the intuitive and spontaneous creativity that flows from drama. This premise did not fit with the expressed needs of this highly verbal group of girls, who repeatedly requested both unstructured time to bond and debrief, as well as structured, facilitated time to engage in “deep talk.” Because verbal analysis is compatible with the praxis-making process of PAR, we decided to increase the time spent in check-in and check-out, and we eventually incorporated discussion time right into the dramatic activities. Although it decreased theatre practice time, we hoped that this discussion would encourage more equal voice and participation, trust building, ongoing evaluation, and the development of critical analysis.⁶⁰ Although in some critical aspects we struggled to respond to roadblocks and tensions, our ability to switch gears and redefine our approach at other junctures throughout the process reveals a flexibility and fluidity that supports TE.

Striving For Critical Analysis

The challenges we faced also speak to the difficulties inherent in charting new and contested methodological territory. We had very few precedents to guide our

⁶⁰ As I discuss subsequently, these changes were part of a more comprehensive restructuring strategy; on their own, they did not substantially alter the embedded power dynamics in the group.

application of PT as a feminist research methodology within a minority research team. The difficulties of working with undertheorized and already marginalized methods was highlighted in our efforts to develop a girl-centered analysis. In a context where such knowledge is not readily accessible, it is understandable that our team had few opportunities to develop a firmly established shared critical language for postcolonial, transnational feminist analysis. Although we did sign on to a common agenda, we represented vastly different social locations and backgrounds, each mediated by diverse histories and politics. Already spaces of deep contention, these locations cannot be presumed as natural places of solidarity. Our alliances were provisional, built through negotiation, effort, and struggle.

This highlights further the difficulties of naming interlocking but always shifting systems of oppression. As with all applications of PT, the limitations of TO as a tool for self-representation and for tracking hegemony in women's and girls' lives is a concern. In its traditional applications, TO derives its impact from exposing deeply embedded economic and sociopolitical gaps between oppressor and oppressed, rich and poor, peasant and ruling class, colonizer and colonized. These dichotomies were too undifferentiated to convey the nuances of emerging cultural formations produced by globalization and transnationalization. In our application, we did not want simply to depict stereotypical representations, but rather to complicate and deconstruct emerging iterations of gendered racism produced at the nexus of shifting social forces. Yet complex social issues can become diluted as they are shaped into aesthetically pleasing productions that aim to be widely accessible to audiences. Social problems that are documented, conveyed, and resolved within a short public presentation can become one-dimensional, and ensuing discussions and analyses are often too simplistic to excavate the underpinning lines of power. For example, the Jamaican women of Sistren Theatre have struggled for years to represent the complexity of Black women's experiences as

gendered, colonized, and sexualized subjects in their theatre productions, which typically last for one to two hours (Di Cenzo & Bennett, 1992; Green, 1994). As Sistren has found, PT can work against the goal of producing multilayered, anti-colonial, and feminist analyses that illuminate and problematize social practices, policies, and structures (Di Cenzo & Bennett, 1992). Without the application of a transnational feminist theoretical framework, we lacked the theoretical tools to get at the heart of these issues, and the PAR process of critical consciousness building stalled. This was evidenced by the girls' responses to one of our anonymous debrief questions, "What I wanted to talk about but didn't, was..."

The emotional, deep stuff like racism, cultural differences and all that stuff, but I felt like I shouldn't because that wasn't what we were talking about.

The issues that we are here to discuss weren't discussed in depth. Share more personal experiences, get to the point, move faster into our goals.

We are still not getting to the real issues of girls' lives, how we are in our cultures, and as girls, what they expect of us, being different in Victoria.

The girls' insistence that they wanted to engage in 'deep talk' about 'deep stuff' and 'real issues' reflected their desire to engage more critically with the complexity of their experiences as multilocalized, gendered, racialized, classed, sexualized, aged subjects. In subsequent sections of this chapter, I explore the difficulty of translating a theoretically complex feminist, anti-racist analytical framework into an accessible, compelling girl- and audience-friendly theatre production. Here is another impetus for disciplinary cross-pollination and for my argument that minority girls require much more multilayered frameworks for self-representation. Our traditional models, whether relational, methodological, or organizational, must be reviewed and expanded to contend with this complexity.

Reflections from a Researcher-Facilitator

Despite having been involved with the many ups and downs of the study and Anti-dote for over five years, the initial few months of the group-building phase were by far the most challenging for me. Throughout the project, tensions among my overlapping roles as youth worker, researcher, and theatre facilitator were difficult to reconcile, and I struggled with how to ethically engage with my insider knowledge of the girls' lives. As a youth worker I had seen many of these girls volunteer for various initiatives and rehearse for hours while remaining focused and energized. I knew first hand how focused, dedicated, and professional they could be when the process was geared to their needs. As I reflected in my field notes, I attributed the girls' sense of alienation to our approach, rather than to any failure on their part:

While we are all critical of dominant discourses of child participation, we have not agreed on a viable alternative and in the process are silencing any discussion of participation within the group. Some of the team members suggested I was unable to maintain objectivity because of my other professional and preexisting relationships with the girls. It has indeed been extremely difficult for me to passively stand by and let the research process evolve without intervention when I see how much our hard-won relationships with the girls are being damaged; I do feel as though I am betraying their trust. We had invited them on the premise of following up on their requests for further engagement, yet suddenly we seemed unwilling to follow up with a truly participatory process. At the same time, I want to honour Susana's role and expertise and do not want to alienate her, yet I feel that we are losing the girls because of an approach that does not reflect what the hallmark of feminist PAR means to me.

My deference to more senior and experienced mentors speaks to familiar tensions for graduate students, and particularly young academics, involved in participatory transgenerational projects.⁶¹ I assumed that my relative lack of experience invalidated my intuitive and professional sense of the root causes of the group dynamics. I realize now that younger researchers and graduate students are able to occupy a place in the research

⁶¹ See, for example, Leadbeater, Banister, Benoit, Jansson, Marshall, and Rieken (2006).

that more senior and experienced researchers and facilitators may not always access. As the youngest member of our team and one of the most present on the ground, I quickly became an ‘in-betweenener’ who felt accountable to the closely knit relationships forged among the participants. The girls’ comments illustrate that they developed unique relationships with the younger women, relating to them as valuable allies and border crossers, not quite adults.

I loved chilling with the girls, Sandrina and Simrita,⁶² I don’t count [them] as adults. (final theatre debrief, speaker not specified)

Sandrina for sure had our backs, she was like one of us. (final theatre debrief, speaker not specified)

As the in-between ally who ‘had their backs,’ I was in many respects a privileged ethnographer; I was privy to many of the girls’ under-the-radar discussions about the research and the researchers and could adjust my own practice accordingly.⁶³ My level of trust was enhanced by the fact that I had known some of the girls for years and was working with them in other projects. These multiple points of connection we shared as members of a broader community were critical to our ability to work collaboratively to resolve group dynamics, and also formed an important enabling condition of TE.

However, the girls’ perception of me as an ‘ally’ also meant that they expected me to advocate on their behalf with ‘the adults’ and that my position afforded me tremendous—and potentially manipulative—power and authority over the girls. For instance, I found that I could more easily challenge the girls without damaging trust or compromising the group’s safety levels; in turn, the girls seemed more willing to take

⁶² Simrita was one of the conference coordinators who worked with the girls in the conference planning committee.

⁶³ I should also emphasize that, as a result of my insider position, I have little data documenting any critical feedback from the girls about my own role. Because of their strong allegiance to me, they never explicitly criticized my work during debriefs; of course, I cannot assume that they had no criticisms of me simply because these were not captured by our documentation.

risks and meet commitments, such as demonstrating more honesty and vulnerability during discussions and volunteering for extra rehearsals.

Despite this ethical complexity, graduate students who act as in-betweeners provide multiple vantage points that can enrich the process of partnership building. Yet simply assuming that graduate researchers are somehow more invested and better equipped to meet the needs of young participants would be a simplistic assessment of the many elements required of good community-based research (CBR), particularly when graduate students are not accountable to the other demands of research that principal investigators may be faced with, such as timelines, methodological and ethical considerations, liabilities, budget constraints, and institutional expectations. It is crucial that research teams work to engage more meaningfully and transparently with ethical dilemmas related to partnerships and accountability.

Getting It—Together!

Despite the struggles, after a process of intensive team consultation we managed to develop a blueprint to restructure our research design and team. This included a reconfiguration of the team roles and responsibilities, timelines, methodologies, and group process. Susana decided that she would step down from her role as theatre director to act as a consultant, and that she would come back to provide directorial feedback once the skits were ready to perform. At this point, Jo-Anne asked me to become the primary theatre facilitator. I agreed, hoping that this new role would provide me with the opportunity to incorporate a girl-friendly, organic, and more collaborative approach in line with my understanding of feminist research and the principles of PAR and PT. I developed a hybrid PT framework, collating techniques drawn from TO, other PT traditions, participatory research, art and drama therapy, popular education, and my practice as a youth worker. In my experience, teen girls require the safety of multiple

vantage points from which to become engaged, from unregimented bonding time filled with humour and visceral learning, to more intense debriefing spaces where they can unfold their lives in all their vulnerability. I believed that with opportunities to nurture trust and take ownership of the process, the girls would naturally invest the time and energy necessary to develop the aesthetic qualities required of the production. This would in turn provide a platform for the girls to engage with critical knowledge production on their own terms.

Transgenerational Partnerships

Ultimately, TE is about establishing a workable balance among building relationships and trust, spending unstructured time, developing critical analysis, meeting deadlines, working toward action, and juggling unexpected roadblocks. Over the next few months, while maintaining the organic and open-ended nature of our design, our reconfigured team focused on developing a common conceptual framework, thematic cohesiveness, and, most importantly, a sense of group belonging and shared purpose. A strength of the idiosyncratic nature of PT is that it invites contradiction; conflict and differences can become grounds from which to build conflict management and group process facilitation skills. We developed mechanisms to explicitly vent issues and concerns, even if they were not always resolved. While we continued to struggle with power issues (e.g., rehearsal times, the budget, and the honoraria were ongoing points of contention), they were no longer rooted in the sense of voicelessness and tokenism that had dominated the outset of the project. Our group rebuilding process went a long way toward restoring relational integrity, as expressed in the following excerpts from our final evaluation after the conference, where the girls commented on their evolving relationships with the adult members of the team.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The speakers were not identified in this transcript.

The level of trust and comfort in the group was good. I felt comfortable discussing anything. I shared most things, the adults did a good job of getting what we had to say and what we were about.

It went from 1 to 10, it was a whopping change, 100% change in my books because I never trust anyone.

My relationship with the adults is also good, I have learned a lot from them; the level of trust and comfort was not bad, I could trust with certain things, not everything, if the adults also opened up to us it would have been better.

You handled us very well and patiently, you drove us everywhere.... There was nothing else to do, I shared how much I want to share, I was very very comfortable.

I feel close like we are a family; the adults are very nice and caring; I was able to feel comfortable and share all my feelings.

Some of the girls still felt that the adults did not open up enough but, overall, their assessments of their relationships with the women were positive, demonstrating increased levels of trust, accountability, communication, and belonging, significant transitions that contributed to the project's success and allowed TE to thrive.

Transformative Engagement in Action

Once we learned to work collaboratively, to address conflicts explicitly and respectfully, and to facilitate activities that were suited to the group, we saw a different sort of transformation emerge, similar to what Ravitch experienced. As the tug of war slowly dissipated, the process of TE flourished. Within a few weeks, the girls' enthusiasm seemed rejuvenated; they re-engaged with us, themselves, and the process, they found time to rehearse, showed up on time, practiced their lines, and completed tasks. The change was both drastic and incredibly simple.

Importantly, the establishment of relational integrity enhanced opportunities for critical consciousness and knowledge creation, providing openings to facilitate the infusion of a transnational feminist analysis into the skits. In a few months, we had developed and polished four skits and had begun preparing for our conference

presentations. At the same time, many of the girls became increasingly engaged in other aspects of the larger PAR project, helping to recruit other girls, working on the website, and planning the conference. The development of critical mass through this more cohesive, ever-expanding collective of girls and women working together to build skills and role-modelling capacity was a crucial community-building outcome of the research; it set the stage for the more sustainable expansion of TE beyond the PAR process itself.

The Quandary of Analysis: A Critical Approach to Relational Practice

Facilitation Skills with Girls

I now turn to the need discussed at the beginning of the chapter for a suitably complex praxis of community building that is at once theoretically informed and incisive, and relationally congruent. The integration of critical analysis is not only a necessary component of PAR, but something the girls had explicitly requested in the focus groups. We infused our theatre process with a deeply historicized, politicized feminist critical framework that went far beyond the rhetoric of mainstream girl-power slogans. But even after we reconstituted our project, we continued to struggle with the ongoing schism between our highly theoretical analysis and the implementation of girl-friendly participatory principles. In the midst of this struggle, our use of academic jargon sometimes intellectualized the ‘relational’ out of our relationships with the girls.

I don't even know what this stuff means. (Evelyn)

Some of the adults used university language we couldn't understand and girls' opinions or our way of saying things wasn't always respected.

(Prisha)

She talked too much about things we didn't know about, used too big words. (Barbara)

The feminist premise that a structural or material analysis is in itself transformative and inherently emancipatory is a fallacy of sorts. In order for critical

knowledge to be meaningful, girls need applications that resonate with their realities. Unfortunately, relational dilemmas tend to fall outside of the critical radar of theoretical feminists; they are often characterized as ‘practical details’ rather than as revealing representations of what implementing feminist principles actually looks like on the ground. Girl-relevant feminist praxis requires multiple and flexible vantage points for girls to move back and forth between academic “expert discourses” (Naples, 2003, p. 11) and their own oppositional strategies that remain unacknowledged within feminism. In our attempts to thread together feminist analysis and girls’ micropractices of engagement, we achieved critical consciousness only once we had established relationships that could make room for ‘encounters of difference’ between women’s and girls’ concerns and voices.

This is why I argue that an interdisciplinary framework is required for a more critical theorizing and application of relationships and community building in feminist research. The two fields which inform my analysis—the applied field of youth/girl work and the conceptual frameworks provided by transnational and postcolonial feminisms—engage very differently with these issues. I reemphasize that fruitful points of connection exist between the two that can amplify discussions of relational dilemmas in community-based feminist research. In this respect, the adult-driven fields of feminism and PAR have much to learn from the practices of applied youth/girl work. Because of their front-line experiences in working directly with young people, youth workers generally possess valuable experiential skills and knowledge to authentically and effectively negotiate relational challenges. Relational theories in the field of child and youth care draw on psychological conceptualizations of intersubjectivity, where the use of ‘self’ is paramount (Garfat & McElwee, 2007). The intersubjective encounter—through which healing and transformation become manifest—is grounded in an ‘ethic of care’ defined by intentionality, mindfulness, empathy, and co-determination. Youth workers engage this

ethic of care as a strategy to center the voices and needs of marginalized or vulnerable young people. In our own process of facilitating PT, we learned how critical it was that the facilitator have the necessary skills and passion to engage the ethics of care with the girls.

Girl-specific facilitation cannot be simulated by simply transferring adult facilitation skills or feminist analysis *onto* girls. Facilitation with girls is a qualitatively different process, requiring very different tools and training, attitude and energy levels, knowledge of girls' development, interaction styles, and individual and social realities. Notwithstanding individual and cultural differences and the socially constructed nature of psychological development which shapes the meaning attached to girlhood and adolescence, girls in this age range are experiencing significant biophysical, physiological, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. These transitions directly impact their availability for, and commitment to, research as well as their analytical and relational skills. PT facilitators must understand how adolescent girls process information and how they use symbolic, abstract, and analytical thinking, verbal and nonverbal communication, and interpersonal relationships to make critical sense of their experiences and engage with others in transformative practices. The ethics of care elucidate exactly what is required of relationships in PAR and PT. They must be purposeful and intentional, reciprocal and nurturing; they must support self-determination and accountability; they must be genuine, believable, and congruent; and, most importantly, they must be contextualized and deeply situated in the realities and circumstances of the participants. In the words of Elder Sam: "You just have to invest the time. Even with the best theory, this stuff can't be faked."

Clearly, however, some caveats attach to the highly psychologized (and oversimplistic) argument that 'relationships are the gateway to change.' Relationships are not a panacea for intervening into historical, structural, and systemic inequities. The

ahistorical, depoliticized accounts of intersubjectivity featured in dominant psychological models of change decontextualize the social forces that underpin any social interaction, particularly the power relations embedded in practice and research. These accounts fail to address the most salient dilemma facing researchers and practitioners in increasingly globalized communities—namely, that relationships operate within a priori knowledge and conceptualizations of self and Other, and that this knowledge is already deeply gendered, classed, and racialized. While the relational ethics of care are vital to TE, PAR feminists understand that the process of healing on which transformational relationships are predicated cannot be reduced to psychological explanations.

The Paradox of the Kick-Ass Grrrl

Relationships cannot be neatly separated from the social contexts in which they are produced and managed; indeed, relationships often serve as sites for the production of acceptable femininity. In contrast to youth work discourses, PAR feminists strategically shift the angle of vision away from psychological patterns to highlight the everyday lives of women in their sociopolitical, economic, geographic, and historical contexts. The ethics of care cannot be extricated from discourses about femininity which assume that such ethics reflect ‘natural’ qualities of women and girls, and which, given their links to the feminization of social services as the domain of underpaid women, produce limiting roles for women and girls. In a process of TE, girls must struggle against a dominant psychocultural feminine identity that is conceptualized as inherently relational. Harris (1999) stresses that girls are problematically expected to develop allocentrism, ‘other-centeredness,’ emotional responsibility, and empathy for others:

Young women’s successful passage through adolescence depends on acquiring a capacity for the management of relationships, and an ethic of care ... thoughtfulness, consideration, connectedness and compassion are traits that characterize a healthy and mature adolescent girl (p. 121).

Within this dominant developmental script, the task for girls is to understand themselves in, and be accountable to, relationships, while boys are supposed to assert their autonomy and independence. Here, the ethics of care that are such an integral part of the practice of youth work become reconstituted as an essentializing measure of femininity. Innocuous generalizations such as ‘getting along,’ ‘good group skills,’ and ‘working together’ can become recoded to establish a powerful behavioural script about women’s and girls’ acceptable and unacceptable resistance and participation within groups.

The girls in our project were adept at reading these codes of feminine behaviour. Some of them commented that although the project encouraged girls to speak back to gendered hegemonic practices, they were not always permitted to do so within the group itself. In some respects, our early group-building efforts made light of the girls’ resistance through an ingrained gendered coding that implicitly rewards ‘good’ girls and ostracizes more outspoken and critical ones. The mixed messages girls get about appropriate gender roles can be extremely deleterious to their micropractices of resistance, and therefore to TE. When I was helping Taisha prepare for a presentation at a national girls’ conference in Toronto, she perceptively commented on the contradictory construction of voice and agency within her ongoing work with Anti-dote:

I’m like the bad girl who speaks back, like they think I’m like more a complainer or I just say what I think even if I disagree, and then they think that’s bad in the group... but like because I have a strong voice then I get picked to do the conference presentations and to speak to the media and stuff ... obviously I’m doing something right because I know the issues... I know how to express myself, but then when we work that’s bad, so it’s like OK people, you can’t have me two ways!

It is important to recognize that TE will yield what it will. Feminist researchers cannot selectively spotlight some outcomes and erase others; they must honour the full spectrum of girls’ agency and engagement, even when it does not serve the interests of the research. Thankfully, Taisha never relinquished her voice. She remains a skilled

facilitator, a strong advocate for Anti-dote, and she speaks eloquently and resolutely about girls' experiences. She exemplifies many of the qualities that make feminists—and many of the women on the team—effective advocates themselves, demonstrating that the ability to challenge relationships and to be critical are essential generators of coalition building.

To summarize, relational dilemmas about voice, agency, engagement, and analysis are salient to feminist practice, but while the sociopolitical underpinnings of relationships are undertheorized in the field of applied youth work, the *practice* of relationship remains largely underapplied by feminist conceptual theorists. The schism between theory and practice points to an important disjuncture between feminism and the field of girlhood studies. Many girls and young women experience the seemingly rigid doctrines of feminism as elitist and disconnected from their lived realities, as expressed by Jillien:

Well, of course girls don't want to be called feminists because they're like so strict about everything. All they do is criticize everything ... so like what we say is never good enough unless we're using the right word or whatever.

Feminists, and particularly transnational feminists, must come to terms with the erasure of girls' unique concerns and multiple forms of oppositional agency and advocacy. Jillien's reflections echo Aapola, Gonick, and Harris's contention that girls are a "repeatedly othered subject within feminisms," and that feminisms ignore "the experiences of many young women who do not access these more formal declarations of feminist theory and practice, but may be engaged in feminist 'micropolitics' in their everyday lives" (2005, p. 207). We have much to learn from how girls enact feminist principles through their micropractices of engagement and resistance. The girls in "It's About Us" became adept at using a variety of mediums to organically develop their own perspectives on feminism, anti-racism, and social change. In their daily lives, and for

some, through their participation in Anti-dote, they are practicing multiple kinds of hopeful, subversive, inclusive feminisms located in their own needs and realities.

Conclusion

Despite their intangibility, it is clear that effective relational and facilitative structures do not operate in a vacuum. When engaged without a critical lens and consistent evaluation, relationships can in fact replicate problematic practices which further exclude and recolonize. Although we attempted to demystify and dismantle the iterations of gender, age, and class power relations within our team, we sometimes reified them, further manipulating and misrepresenting the girls' voices and needs in the process. Our experience is an important reminder that our conceptual and subjective knowledge of how power operates in the lives of racialized women and girls did not guarantee our ability to consistently read and work to resolve relational roadblocks. It is critical that researchers attend to the tensions inherent in the very premise of transformational research, whereby purposeful relationships, particularly those which lead to the insertion of an ideological standpoint such as feminism or anti-racism, are potentially exploitative.

In the end, my advocacy for relational practice may be perceived as reproducing the problematic gendered discourse of girls' inherent relational nature. But, while I have paid careful attention to the many potential pitfalls, it does seem to me that the schism between feminist analysis and girl-centered practice is best addressed by engaging with each other in reciprocal, nurturing relationships that provide entryways into subversive and critical counter work—thereby subverting the stereotype of girls as inherently good and collaborative. Relationships are the medium through which other aspects of research—power, knowledge production, benefit sharing, and social action—become discussed, disturbed, challenged, implemented, and evaluated. The visceral transformative power of relationships cannot be supplanted by critical analysis. It was the

strength of our team relationships, not our theories, that carried us through the project's many hitches. Years after the project's conclusion, our friendships continue to sustain the profound transformation of communities and networks in which we still collaborate.

CHAPTER 13:
SPEAKING BACK AND FORWARD: THE PRAXIS OF KNOWLEDGE
CREATION

This is for those of you who understand the dehumanization of coerced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice, you know. You try to keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said (Minh-ha, 1989, p.80).

This chapter tracks the evolution of TE from community building to knowledge production. Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated that racialized minority girls have few opportunities to be full cultural producers; their perspectives and realities are often marginalized socioculturally, within discourses of feminism and youth participation, as well as by profound gaps in Eurocentric research, practice and policy. In this chapter, I illustrate how minority girls' practices of engagement and resistance, and their strategies for negotiating multiple identity conjunctures, might help to bridge these theoretical gaps and inform a more complex theory of girlhood.

'Speaking back and forward' requires the development of critical analysis and critical consciousness, an important premise of the PAR and PT process. Morris (1993) defines critical or oppositional consciousness as "that set of insurgent ideas and beliefs constructed and developed by an oppressed group for the purposes of guiding its struggle to undermine, reform, or overthrow a system of domination" (p. 363). The power of oppositional consciousness lies in its ability to "strip away the garments of universality from hegemonic consciousness, revealing its essentialist characteristics" (p. 363). It is in the challenges inherent in counter-speaking that the value of a liminal, relational, creative methodology becomes manifest. Despite its gaps, PT gives creative expression to silenced experiences; its discursive practices provide girls with tools to enter their own lives as agents in order to intervene into normative scripts and spaces. Without new

knowledge, girls would remain subsumed in dominant discourses that pathologize their sense of exclusion while obscuring its underlying social causes.

Like the other strategies of TE—border crossing, creating communities of belonging, and social action—the creation of counter narratives is not straightforward. We cannot assume an easy and unproblematic flow of knowledge to and from minority girls when such dissonance exists between their complex identities and what they are told they should look, act, and think like. Ladson-Billings (2003) argues:

The process of developing a worldview that differs from the dominant worldview requires active intellectual work on the part of the knower, because schools, society, and the structure and production of knowledge are designed to create individuals who internalize the dominant worldview and knowledge production and acquisition process (p. 399).

Because processes of racialization dismember girls from their own knowledge, an embodied methodology such as theatre is perfectly suited to engage them in linking “their cultural knowledge to their dramatic creations in a way that allows them to stand proudly, speak wisely and see differently” (Gallagher, 2001a, p. 27). This transformation is one of TE’s most difficult manoeuvres: How are precarious spaces of safety opened up to cycles of feminist reflection and discussion, transformed into girl-centered language, grown into theory, and refined into praxis, to a point where a group of racialized girls acts deliberately to challenge accepted power formations in their daily lives?

From Micro to Macro Analysis

The movement from an individual, microanalysis to a congruent macroanalysis is an incredibly challenging aspect of the critical inquiry of PT. PT facilitators guide participants on a systematic critical investigation of interlocking social formations that shape their experiences of marginalization in order to identify potential actions. The task is to balance the subjective with the theoretical by crafting a consistent critical story that

reflects overarching research goals and speaks to team members' diverse individual histories and locations.

Our own process of macroanalysis grew in momentum and complexity once our research team had reestablished a sense of relational congruence. At this point in our process, we were meeting weekly in a large room at the university. After checking in and warming up, we entered our visceral 'drama bubble'; sitting in a circle, we shared ideas, stories, and memories, played with concepts and images, and explored tensions and contradictions. To nurture a sense of creative, collaborative generativity, the girls gradually expanded their repertoire of expressive tools. Working alone, in pairs, or in the larger group, they used interviews, journaling, images, improvisations, role plays, artwork, photography, etc. to explore increasingly complex themes such as 'home,' 'feeling safe,' 'not fitting in,' 'what I never tell anyone,' 'stereotypes about girls like me,' 'my community,' 'places where I feel excluded or included,' and 'strengths I have.'⁶⁵ Each girl suggested personal experiences that we collectively discussed, analyzed, and reviewed. We extended the process of conscientization by continuously asking analytical questions: "Where do these images come from?" "Who thinks this way, and why do you think they do?" "How does this show up in your school, at home, with your friends, in your community?" "How do you think this is different in other cities? Why?" "What would you *want* to say in response to this? How do you think we could change it?"

One critical element of the conscientization process requires the girls to move in and out of their marginal locations so as to develop a more complicated perspective about their "doubled selves" (Du Bois, 1969) or "dual selves" (Fanon, 1986). The notion of doubled selves provides insight into how the process of racialization forges a doubled consciousness. For girls who are constructed through largely dominant scripts, this was

⁶⁵ These themes became the foundation for the four skits and the photovoice project described in the next chapter.

especially difficult. According to Du Bois and Fanon, the dominant group's refusal to recognize the Other forces the Other to see herself reflected through the deliberately distorted gaze of the dominant group (Chalk, 2002; Lee & De Finney, 2005). This 'doubling' undermines and fragments the integrity of the Other and reinforces the power of the dominant group, making it very difficult to name and resist. To develop critical consciousness, the girls had to objectify their personal experiences, essentially making themselves "psychophysically malleable" (Schechter, 2003, p. 321). This required them to put themselves in disequilibrium, step out of their roles as objects and reenter discussions, not only in terms of their own subjectivities, but in awareness of themselves as constituted by social formations. This process was neither linear nor predictable; because of their diverse locations, histories, and voices, the girls developed critical consciousness at different speeds, about different issues, in different contexts, and in diverse ways. The ability to be self-critical and to integrate a macroanalysis is also in part a normal measure of developmental level; in many cases, we saw that the girls did not necessarily think beyond their own subjective interpretations.

As their repertoire of dramatic skills grew and they became more comfortable with the process of critical inquiry, the girls became more involved in challenging and supporting each other to deepen and extend their analysis. It is in drawing the connections between the circumstances of their daily lives and broader social and historical forces that the girls began to generate new knowledge and theory, as well as potential strategies for change. We then combined their stories with other girls' experiences from the focus groups to broaden the scope of the narratives and to make them more relevant for our intended audiences. We shaped these stories into a series of four skits, which gradually evolved into a full drama production. The girls developed the characters, plots, and storylines and wrote the titles, scripts, and introductions for each

skit. At this stage we also introduced a photovoice project, “Shoot This.”⁶⁶ We gave the girls cameras to take photographs of their families, friends, schools and neighbourhoods to represent “where I fit and where I don’t fit in.”

Healing in a Context of High Risk Storytelling

The use of ‘high risk’ personal storytelling as a basis for critical analysis is a much-debated strategy in research for social change. Because there is always a concern with research becoming a process of ‘sad story mining,’ critical storytelling methodologies must account for issues of safety related to the exploitation of painful experiences and the potential triggering and retraumatization of participants. Before moving on to analysis and problem solving, the PT process asked of the girls that they share and deconstruct difficult, sometimes painful and confusing personal stories—all within a space that was always in the process of being negotiated and in which they necessarily felt vulnerable. Depending on the session, the girls’ moods, the context of their lives, our group dynamics, and the theme of the day, their ‘walls’ were at once enveloping and very mobile. Some sessions yielded a flood of disclosures, while at other times, carefully guarded secrets were revealed tentatively in symbolic drawings, silences heavy with grief, an angry word or image, or an introspective line carefully read aloud from a journal. As facilitators, it was our task to sensitively encourage the girls to honour and pick up these threads, while pacing their self-disclosures according to their personal sense of safety and readiness.

Many of the images developed by the girls brought to light the palpable pain of racism, perceptible in their knowing nods, tone of voice, body posture, and hand and facial gestures. Their coping strategies were also revealed in their ‘checking in’ and self-

⁶⁶ “Shoot This” represents a distinct project with its own data and is not featured prominently in my analysis.

care—hugs, back rubs, comforting words—they shared with each other as they acted out difficult scenes. During one particularly intense session, Evelyn developed an image of childhood memories. She created a circle and placed several of us around her, standing tall over her body, shadowing her. She then crouched down as if she were a little girl and literally ‘held herself’ together by wrapping her arms tightly around her body. She explained that “when I was in elementary there was a lot of racist comments towards me and my cousin, it happened from the first time I went to kindergarten to grade 3, 4, 5, it was just kids, especially guys, would come up to you ‘hey chink,’ like that right? They just kept calling us chinks.”

PT importantly opens up spaces of solidarity, where the full spectrum of experiences such as Evelyn’s can be shared and sensitively facilitated without backlash or censorship. Although researchers are reluctant to ascribe therapeutic benefits to research practices, the healing impact of such moments was an important contributor to the development of TE. Boal (1990) concurs with other practitioners⁶⁷ that although PT is not an explicitly therapeutic method, its healing benefits form a critical building block of conscientization. It is important to reemphasize, however, that in our case the therapeutic effects of PT were only fully realized to the extent that we were able to engage the girls in envisioning and embodying change. Instead of using theatre to help the girls to adapt to reality—a traditional therapeutic aim—we used it to alter and contest the status quo and to attune ourselves to opportunities for change.

Oreos, Bananas, and Safety Pins

Once we had unpacked the girls’ strategies for navigating among multiple symbolic, sociocultural, and physical territories, the diversity of their experiences and histories was further highlighted. Here again we saw evidence of the many complicated

⁶⁷ See my discussion in Chapter 7.

relationships to 'ethnic identity' that emerge through multicultural encounters. Girls respond to discrimination in diverse ways that include creating stronger identification with their own ethnic groups, forming subcultures that serve to shield their sense of self or identity from the negative aspects of discrimination and racism, developing oppositional or separate identities, rejecting mainstream values and norms, and distancing themselves from, or developing negative stereotypes about, their own background (Kaspar & Noh, 2001). The girls moved within and across many of these categories of identification, some more prevalent at times, based on context or circumstances; this movement was nonetheless always mediated by broader social forces that confined the identity locations to which they had access.

For instance, while many of the girls in the group (particularly Taisha, Prisha, and Manjeet), responded to experiences of racialization in part by developing an ambiguous relationship with 'Canadianness' and more solidly anchoring their identity in a celebration of their minority status, others coped by strategically erasing their perceived differences, making themselves as "White as possible so I would just fit in" (Jillien). According to Jillien, who struggled with being Chinese in a predominantly White school and neighbourhood, girls like her are often portrayed as "whitewashed, apples, Oreos, bananas—dark on the outside, white inside." Reflecting on her process of conscientization in the project, Jillien talked about gaining the language to contest limited categories for self-representation:

I gained so much from this project, when I first started I didn't even see racism in my life because I go to like an all-White school and I just never talked about it, I never talked with my friends about so many things about me, and I just thought that was normal ... and now I see myself so differently, I see myself as like a whole person, being Asian and all that, I feel proud of that for the first time.

Here again we see the limitations of psychosocial models of ethnic identity formation that presume girls have access to models of identity formation (for instance, parents, ethnocultural communities, or peers) that they can emulate and which will crystallize a balanced, healthy sense of identity. Girls like Jillien who do not traverse the full axis of ethnic identity development are pathologized as remaining in its early stages and categorized as ethnically marginalized and identity-confused. Jillien's words reveal how her process of conscientization enabled her to manipulate her own distorted view of Asian-ness to formulate a new and more complex theory of herself.

Rich Silences

Jillien's experience also emphasizes that living within hegemony and dominant Whiteness does not inherently bestow critical understanding of those conditions. Important in this regard, theatre captures silences that might become lost in other methodologies, and symbolizes them dramatically. It is the facilitator's skill in persistently unearthing, triangulating, and making critical meaning of these silences that is crucial to the process of conscientization. Facilitators must recognize that what is not commonly shared or readily picked up by the group is critical to unpacking essentialized representations of 'girls of colour' in popular culture. To diversify and complicate our data and our own assumptions, we repeatedly asked "Who has a different example?" and "When does this *not* happen?"

The importance of digging beyond cliched or superficial representations became apparent in our earliest discussions of the term 'racism.' In response to this theme, the girls initially depicted a dramatic bullying scene between two rival girl gangs. The scene appeared to be motivated by their assumption of what they thought the women researchers wanted to see. When probed further, they revealed that in fact this sort of explicit bullying happened much less often to them than the racial jokes, name calling,

threats, and taunts that were eventually portrayed in the skit “Curry Rice.” The girls had constructed a narrow definition of racism through the dominant lens of multiculturalism, which reduces racism to explicit acts of racial violence or ‘hate’ between individuals. The girls lacked the language to name the effects of racialization, stereotyping, exclusion, and Othering, which they typically experienced as more subtle, yet deeply pervasive. Many girls initially described these experiences through metaphors of peripherality and marginalization such as “feeling misunderstood,” being “the only yellow or brown girl,” “having no place to be normal,” “having violence because I am coloured,” being excluded from “what a real Canadian is,” feeling “angry or sad about my culture,” “not normal,” “not sexy,” “not popular,” “feeling like an outsider,” or “just different than them.”

In the effort to make a theatre story more dramatic or compelling, subtleties can be lost that may be critical to the point that is being explored. To expose the paradoxes and contradictions and to complexify dramatized caricatures of media images and popular culture, we required a broader and multilayered definition of racism that exposed its many manifestations and effects. With this new language, the girls began to tell other stories, some they claimed they had never shared because they lacked the language and concepts to name racism in complex and useful ways.

Peeling Back the Masks

It is clear that opportunities to develop critical language and to construct oneself outside of prescribed roles are rare in less diverse cities like Victoria. Racialized girls rely on their doubled consciousness as a survival strategy and thus become what Macmillan (2004) terms “mythogenic people,” the target of layered fictions or masks produced by the dominance of colonialism. Like other mythogenic people, in self-defense, racialized girls become “prolific generators of self-descriptive legends,” (p. 71) stories that

effectively mask themselves as a way of finding some sort of internal balance between dominant, essentialized representations, and their knowledge of themselves as undistorted. Our discussions revealed that the girls appropriated and internalized “self-descriptive legends” that served to racialize White girls as less attractive or cultured, such as “I have a nicer ass than White girls”; “I’m Indian so I have more culture than Canadians”; “White is so boring”; “White girls have no flavour”; “they *wish* they could have all this.”

As scattered hegemonies become progressively more fluid and adaptive, minority girls’ relationships of social power are increasingly constituted by ambiguity and movement. It can be argued that the girls’ ‘view from the liminal’ gives them a perspective advantage; as suggested by Fanon (1986), it is difficult to resist the temptation to manipulate the masks when you understand both sides so well, leading to passive, hidden, and sometimes overt resistance to dominant or hegemonic narratives, with all the messiness and contradiction this implies. MacMillan (2004) notes that the dramatic space of theatre becomes a site for representing these contradictions:

Fanon’s insights into the colonized psyche, having to intimately know the heart and the mind of the master better than the master knows those things himself, finds its bitter truth in the text for performance. . . . Persona literally means the masks through which we speak. For those of us who negotiate the everyday by using many voices, many guises and strategies because we have to, the performance text in the hybrid form can transgress the traditions and conventions of the play and give voice to our experience of the contemporary world—with all its mixed messages (p. 64).

We can see from the girls’ use of ‘counter stereotypes’ that they do not exercise subservience or power in predictable or frictionless ways. Depending on their own positioning in relation to multiple hegemonies and spaces of resistance, girls may be empowered and resistive in one context yet passive or subordinate in another. Their comments reflect the many paradoxical strategies they use to engage with and reformulate racialized stereotypes and myths. For instance, in our discussions we saw the

girls draw on counter stereotypes in part because these were the only representations to which they had access, and in part to benefit from the popularity and credibility the myths afforded them. Counter stereotypes also provided a language of contestation of the imposition of pathology, powerlessness, and dependency. This latter use—as a resistance strategy—was perceived as especially threatening by White friends, teachers, and other authority figures. The girls were often accused of ‘reverse racism’ and told that “two wrongs don’t make a right.” These efforts to manage, dilute, and marginalize their practices of resistance reflect a fear of minority girls’ ability to reappropriate and speak back.

Pulling it All Together: The “It’s About Us” Theatre Production

After months of intensive preparation and rehearsals, we developed a 45-minute production comprised of four skits. Here I present brief excerpts from each skit along with their introductions, all written by the girls.

i. A Day in the Life. The first skit, “A Day in the Life,” exposes the many strings—intersecting forms of racism, sexism, classism, and ageism—pulling at a minority girl in her day-to-day life. Taisha, the central character, is positioned at the center of the stage and her wrists are wrapped in long strings, each held by a different person (a friend, a teacher, and a neighbour) located around the room. The skit is Taisha’s commentary on the daily messages that reduce her complexity and silence her cultural knowledges.

The first skit we are going to do is called “A Day in the Life.” It’s about a girl’s day in Victoria from the moment she wakes up in the morning. We want to show all the different parts of her life, all the different messages she gets from different people that all contradict each other, like her friends, teachers and neighbours. It shows how sometimes people judge you lower because they think you can’t do something because they have an image of you, maybe they got it from television, like how some people always assume that I used to live in a hut because I grew up in Ethiopia. Or they want you to be someone you’re not, they diminish you because

they have a stereotype about who you are supposed to be. So the skit is about what it's like to deal with all those different messages from different people. (Taisha, 16)

Excerpt from “A Day in the Life”:

Taisha, speaking to teacher: I was just wondering why I got a low mark on my current events paper.

Teacher: Well, racism is not really a current event, it's good but you were supposed to write about something in the news that week, like the BC Hydro dispute, or housing issues, or crime.

Taisha: But racism is a current event, it happens all the time, it happens in our school every day, I mean it's a part of our lives.

Teacher: I understand it affects your life, but the assignment was about a current issue that affects the whole province, something that has been in the news this week.

Taisha: But this does affect our lives, they just don't talk about it in the news!

Teacher is silent and simply stares back at Taisha. The vignette ends and Taisha is pulled to the other side of the room.

Taisha to her neighbour: I just won an award for anti-racism leadership!

Neighbour: Oh dear, after just a few years here, you're such a smart girl, you learned English so quickly, that's very impressive, good for you!

Taisha: I had to do a speech in front of so many people talking about the work we do to educate other kids about racism.

Neighbour: And you've only been here a few years, that's just amazing, you were able to do a speech in English.... Your people must be so proud of you!

As Taisha travels through the spheres of her everyday life, she is confronted with the prevalence of distorted discourses and representations that render her, paradoxically, hyperexposed yet invisible in her complexity. Her encounter with her teacher represents the pervasive denial of colonialism and racism that permeates educational curricula and institutions. Although she resists this silencing, Taisha is penalized for naming racism, not only by being ostracized by her teacher, but in receiving a lower grade, both of which

reemphasize that her sociocultural and political knowledge of racism is not only irrelevant, but offensive.

The neighbour's comments reflect the stereotypical view that success and engagement are unusual occurrences for immigrant girls of colour. Taisha is praised for being a "good girl" and for her knowledge of English and quick adaptation, but her anti-racism activism is ignored. Clearly, how minority girls understand their roles is contingent upon prevailing and sanctioned representations of agency and participation. These representations are inextricably linked to other institutional domains and discursive terrains that reproduce stereotypical images of 'racialized girlhoods.' Hierarchical dichotomies between 'modern' and 'traditional' cultures pathologize girls who are located across multiple contexts. As Taisha expresses, minority girls are expected to choose between rigid, mutually exclusive options that provide little room for contesting imposed identity categories: "You're either ghetto, you're like an immigrant, or you're a cool rich White girl." These hierarchies of differentiation manage girls' citizenship and social inclusion by structuring access to success, leadership, social inclusion and power, while ignoring the contributions of girls who may be juggling multiple identifications, in effect furthering their social exclusion and limiting their potential advocacy and leadership roles.

ii. **"The 'Real Talk' Talk Show."** The second skit is a mock talk show entitled "The 'Real Talk' Talk Show." The girls sit in a row and offer comments on the stereotypes they deal with living in Victoria.

Excerpt from "The 'Real Talk' Talk Show":

The music starts, and the talk show host greets her guests.

Sandrina: Welcome everyone and welcome to Real Talk! Today we're talking with five outspoken girls who are going to share their perspective on stereotypes people have about

racialized minority girls, girls like them. So let's start with some of the biggest stereotypes people have about you.

Evelyn: People think that because we're Asian females, we're petite, we're not curvy, and we're "tight," so we'll be good in bed.

Barbara: Yeah, and we're all good in science, and rich.

Prisha: They think because I'm Middle Eastern I'm all hairy and I have big hips ... and I'm a terrorist of course. That's the only image of us they have, that's all you hear about.

Sandrina: Where do these stereotypes come from?

Manjeet: They're all images, stereotypes, that get created through history, starting with colonialism, for example when India was colonized by Britain they had all these stereotypes about Indians being sexual or hairy, just not as good as them. So that's around for hundreds of years, the same stereotypes, in history books, everywhere. So when people think of Indians, that is the only image that comes to mind. And now that image is in the media, in our schools, like how Madonna took on a spiritual Indian persona, it just keeps the stereotype going. And girls eat that stuff up.

Barbara: It definitely comes from everywhere, I mean your family, schools, TV, music.

Taisha: Yeah, it's a lot of pressure when that's all you see. Like because I'm Black they think I'll have this big booty and that I can dance ... but then the guys don't really want to date Black girls, they want the White girls who act Black, so I think "well, where does that leave me?" Then they try to tell me there's no racism because Black culture is so popular, so I shouldn't complain.

The girls' comments reveal their knowledge of the starkly etched boundaries and signifiers of gendered racialization. Taisha and Manjeet observe that White girls who 'act' Indian or Black serve as floaters, able to sample (and be rewarded for sampling) different cultural attributes without having to experience the effects of social exclusion. When the girls name this reality, they are confronted with a dehistoricized discourse of multiculturalism that purports a false equality. Taisha understands that this discourse feeds into the commodification of Black women's bodies, where marginalized racial locations are uprooted from the specific material and historical conditions—poverty, slavery, racialization—that shape them and are repackaged as mainstream, commercialized identities (Giroux, 1996). Giroux warns that in such cases, "difference

functions primarily to generate new markets and expand patterns of consumption, assert itself within rigid cultural boundaries, and deepen strains of racial and class antagonisms” (1996, p. 13).

Importantly, the ‘Real Talk’ critique demonstrates a critical aspect of TE; here the girls model for the audience a historicized, critical analysis in a language that is congruent with girls’ voices and realities.

iii. Curry Rice. “Curry Rice” unpacks notions of ‘Asian-ness’ by exposing the contradictory classed, gendered, and sexualized forces that underlie the many faces of gendered racisms. The skit starts with the girls sleeping in a high school history class as a teacher expounds on the contributions of Canada’s two founding nations, France and Britain. The school bell rings, and as Jillien, Barbara, and Evelyn (all identifying as Chinese-Canadian) walk out of class, they bump into Prisha and Manjeet (identifying here as Punjabi/South Asian-Canadian). A verbal exchange ensues.

This skit is called “Curry Rice.” It’s about some of the dynamics that girls play out in school. It shows two groups of Asian girls who have a confrontation after class. The class is really boring because the curriculum only talks about European history, so three of the girls, Chinese-Canadian girls, walk out yawning and bump into two Punjabi girls. They start insulting each other with all these racial stereotypes. This was our way of talking about everything, we always think about other groups, but we never say it out loud, but it happens all the time between girls. This is how we judge who we hang out with and how we look and talk to other groups. (Jillien, 16)

Excerpt from “Curry Rice”:

Prisha: Did you just bump into me?

Barbara: Whatever, move along, your curry’s getting cold.

Manjeet: Bitch, why are you so upset, did your souped-up Honda break down?

Jillien: What about you? Maybe your uncle forgot to pick you up in his taxi?

Prisha: Whatever, Fried Rice, are you pissed cuz you’re so *short*?

Evelyn: How would you know, I can't even tell you apart... Hinder, Binder, Jinder, you all look the same to me.

This skit further explicates the multiple lateral ethnocultural racisms discussed in Chapter 10. Our research discussions highlighted the girls' experiences of Otherness not only to the dominant culture and groups, but to dominant norms within and across the girls' own ethnocultural communities. One indicator of discourses of Otherness were the euphemisms that the girls used to describe their social distance from what they perceive to be 'the center' or 'the norm,' not only with the dominant society, but within their perceptions of South, South-East, Central and Western 'Asianness.' Acutely aware of inner group differences and ethnocultural social hierarchies, the girls wanted to distance themselves from other categories of 'Asianness' which they did not view in positive ways. Signifiers of body shape, clothing, accent, family name, place of birth, and class all structure how girls impose and transgress categories of insider/outsider in their relations with each other. In this skit, the girls show that they not only internalize these images, but actively participate in regulating and reproducing them through expressions of verbal violence such as name-calling, teasing, and taunting.

By exposing girls' experiences with horizontal and internalized gendered racisms, "Curry Rice" further challenges dominant understandings of racism as being only about skin colour and Black and White dichotomies. The dialogue rejects artificial categories of 'sameness' and reframes debates about authenticity, belonging, and exclusion as always shifting and fluid, continuously defined in relation to vectors of power that determine Otherness within, among and outside of ethnocultural communities.

iv. Popularity. In "Popularity," our final skit, the effects of compulsory heterosexual Whiteness in popular culture are highlighted. The skit is based on Evelyn's experience of being pressured by three popular girls to whitewash and 'sexify' her appearance. The girls participate in the social reproduction and regulation of popular

media images by pressuring Evelyn to lighten her hair and stuff her bra to “look hot” for the boys they are meeting at a party. In this skit, the popular girls include both White and Chinese girls. Evelyn wanted to demonstrate that, because images of popular culture are so prevalent and difficult to contest, all girls have the potential to reproduce exclusive codes of beauty and belonging, particularly when they are living in a city where alternative representations are difficult to access.

The next skit we will do is called “Popularity.” It’s about popularity and fitting in in junior high, it’s a story that happened to me. The skit shows how some girls get pressured to fit in based on their looks and their clothes, and how much damage you can cause if you start to question your own looks or compare them to someone you’ll never be. Sometimes, girls think that to fit in, you have to look a certain way, like be thin with a certain body type, and look like you have light hair and light skin. But the only thing is many of us will never look like that. So we wanted to show how that works and how you can react to it. This skit has a second where we will get some audience members to take the actors’ place and change the story. So this skit is called “Popularity.” (Evelyn, 14)

Excerpt from “Popularity”:

Could we do something to her hair ... it needs to have highlights or something ...

Yeah, it’s so *dark* ... so flat ... so *depressing!*

You *definitely* need some blond highlights, to make your hair look shiny, prettier ... and what are we gonna do about your cleavage? You’re so flat! Guys like boobs!

But I don’t want to, I like the way I look.

Whatever, you’ll thank us later, this is good for you, trust us! You’ll look hot with the blond highlights, and you’re so skinny, that’s perfect.

This skit reveals that in Victoria, beauty, attractiveness, and popularity remain largely coded as White, thin, blonde, and straight. These codes, deeply entwined with signifiers of social belonging and ‘Canadian-ness,’ intersect to create “marginalized others whose lives, bodies, relationships and selves do not conform to the dominant forms of girlhood circulated by these discourses” (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 3).

What bears further comment is that this deeply pervasive process of racialization is rarely acknowledged. Girls are taught to discount race as a factor of exclusion, coding it instead as a measure of beauty. Here again, the data point to the overwhelming denial in the dominant culture that requires minority girls ‘not to know what they know.’ Lalik and Oliver (2005) observed a similar phenomenon in their study of racialization in girls’ beauty pageants in U.S. schools. Although the girls they interviewed made multiple references to racial inequities, none actually named racism as a factor in their experiences with beauty and popularity, nor in their measures of authenticity (i.e., who is White, Black, who passes, etc.). For instance, in one particular pageant in a predominantly African-American school, the darker-skinned Black girls were eliminated in the first round, leaving mainly White and light-skinned interracial contestants. One girl observed:

I don’t think it was fair ... because most of the girls that won, it’s not necessarily a racial part, but you know, every girl that was up there [in the top 11] was blonde hair and green eyes, blond hair and blue eyes. And Rachel, I don’t even think the judges knew that she was a mixed, or had Black in her because her skin was so light (Lalik & Oliver, 2005, p. 93).

Although this girl knows that all of the finalists are White or pass for White, she minimizes her own knowledge of racism by stating that “it’s not necessarily a racist part.” Fine, Stewart, and Zucker (2000) found a similar pattern in their ethnographic studies of White girls, whom they found tend to actively participate in reproducing gendered racisms through their systemic silencing of race politics and their loyalty to dominant patriarchal White formations. Fine et al. stress that White girls are invested in reproducing Whiteness as innocent and neutral because it aligns them with White boys, and releases them from having to tell the “secrets of privilege, sexuality, danger, terror, violence and oppression to which they are also exposed” (p. 62).

While the skirts provided examples to audience members of how to name, stretch, and counter entwined iterations of sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, and

xenophobia, they also revealed the limitations of such strategies. Evelyn and Taisha's fruitless protestations demonstrate the difficulty of 'speaking back' in such a context.

Meanwhile, girls who do speak back or who reappropriate racial stereotypes face backlash and further marginalization. Collins (1990), Fine et al. (2000), and Fordham (1996) found that girls of colour tend to more often verbalize and make public their critique of processes of gendered racialization, and are therefore "hated, demonized, silenced or banished for revealing hypocrisies, domination and injustices" (Fine et al., 2000, p. 62). The skits demonstrate how discursive practices of domination and, often to a lesser degree, resistance and subversion, operate to position girls in particular roles and locations within normative Whiteness.

Transformation? Where? How?

The juxtapositioning of critical analysis and individual stories is an explicit and commonly recognized goal of PAR and PT; nonetheless, counter knowledge is never produced without contradiction. Here again it is most useful to think of critical consciousness not as an easily observable, linear process with a quantifiable threshold, but as a highly contextualized spectrum with multiple and always emerging entry points, characteristics, and effects. Important to the evolution of TE were the girls' interactions outside the mediated theatre space, where skits can be carefully rehearsed and vetted by researchers. As I have explained in previous chapters, one pitfall in participatory research is the tendency to guide girls toward a constructed analysis that never really becomes integrated into their own language and realities. In such cases, participants become mimics of critical analysis rather than transformed, critically conscious agents. As such, it was in their unscripted interactions with friends, family, the media, and audiences that the girls' level of comfort with new critical knowledge was most evident. Each demonstrated their growing critical consciousness in different ways, and in relation to different issues

and experiences, as illustrated in their wide array of responses to audiences and during debriefs.

The project has really paved the way and now I can really actually walk out my door and hold my head up high and go, hey I'm proud to be a racialized minority. (Manjeet)

I never use that word. (Evelyn)

Really? I do. (Taisha)

No, never. (Evelyn)

Yeah, I do. (Manjeet)

I think that term has had a big impact on me already. (Jillien)

Yeah. Now I have more knowledge and I can actually talk back to them and say "you cannot say this to me." (Taisha)

But I think they'll call me names no matter what. (Prisha)

This exchange exposes the highly contextual nature of critical consciousness and the variation in the girls' use of terminology and concepts, and in their comfort with articulating an explicitly feminist awareness with their peers and families. Prisha's comment also recognizes that new language and knowledge do not in themselves interrupt systemic racisms. As Prisha points out, because individual stories and skits are limited in their ability to unsettle deeply entrenched relations of ruling, it is often what transpires outside the performance, in the broader process of TE, that holds rich transformative potential. What did seem to develop more systematically among all the girls was a more personal sort of transformation and sense of empowerment that transferred to their lives off the stage.

I just feel more self-confidence about myself. (Evelyn)

I am not as shy as before, I can say what I need to say. (Barbara)

These observations support other research with women and girls, reviewed in Chapter 6, that demonstrates drama's transformative potential. Cognitive functions, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence—all building blocks of critical consciousness—are developed as girls are asked to accommodate other perspectives, consider alternatives, and explore the historical and social underpinnings of their own realities. Taisha observes the catalytic value of reworking concrete solutions to everyday instances of exclusion:

I was so frustrated with this teacher, I just felt like I lost the battle with her, but then when we did the play I practiced what I would have said, and I felt so good! It was like I would never let that happen again because I saw how I could actually stand up to her instead of just getting pissed by myself.

Over the life of our very complex project, the outcomes of critical consciousness could also be noted in the evidence of new critical behaviour, language, and skills, in the growing cohesion of a community, and in the translation of conscientization into strategies for change—in short, in the emergence of TE. The process of peer modelling played an important role in their ability to share and bridge analytical strategies and develop a “language of critique” (Lalik & Oliver, 2005). This is where the transformative potential of feminist analysis became manifest:

I felt most empowered and enthusiastic when we started discussing ourselves as ‘invisible.’ I got how I feel, it was nice to put it into words. (Jillien)

Once I got it, it made such a difference to how I see myself and all the things that happen to me, it's like I could really explain what happened to my family, and ... how to react to it, like, not blaming myself, more being able to sort of say to people, you can't blame this on me, I know it's actually a *systemic* issue. (Manjeet)

Conclusion

The findings explicated in this chapter indicate that the PT process was challenging and interactive enough to sustain the girls' TE, revealing the depth of their

own culturally derived critical consciousness—not as mere conduits of their social reality, but as critical commentators and active agents. The knowledge creation process provided them with dialogical tools to engage with highly abstract theoretical language, create spaces for multiple belongings, and build capacity for practice and research that promotes community development and social change. In this process, the girls demonstrated how a model of TE could be tailored to their individual particularities while ensuring relevance, applicability, and sustainability in the real lives of girls.

CHAPTER 14:

SETTING THE STAGE FOR ACTION: THE PRAXIS OF PERFORMANCE

The introduction of an audience is a critical transition in any theatre process. Performance moves transformative engagement (TE) onto the stage and into the continuous loop of audience feedback. In performance, the encounter between actors and audience takes precedence over the intimate group work in which stories are crafted, adding a new layer of praxis to TE by moving from the development of oppositional agency within the group to oppositional solidarity with a much wider community. The stage provides a mediated 'space of encounter' between girls and audiences, an opportunity to build solidarity and to evaluate and expand applications of findings. Here, peer-led education comes to the forefront of the participatory theatre process. In taking the stage, the girls do not ask, they bring; they publicly stamp their own reality onto the imprint of dominant narratives.

Walking on stage and everything, yeah I feel way more confident now to speak in public about these issues and be an advocate for other girls like me, to really make change happen. (Manjeet, final evaluation debrief).

After we got the skits, the conference done, I felt really fulfilled.... It was a rush to finally show everyone our hard work. (speaker unknown)

I loved the performance of it, I was so nervous, yeah, it was awesome, all what we went through, to show it like that and tell everyone how important it is. (Taisha)

It was like the end of the road, everything we had to say was right there. (Barbara)

These reflections illustrate how the performance process expanded and extended the girls' TE. Less clear, however, are the implications for social change beyond the transformative experiences of the research team. TE does not automatically transfer to audiences; what takes a group months to nurture cannot be replicated in a one-hour performance. The goals of production and performance are different entirely. Our

performances provided a medium to test the validity and coherence of our theorization with a new interpretive community. We hoped, but could not guarantee, that the transformation and consciousness raising experienced by the girls would extend to some degree to wider audiences and provide them with entry points into our growing community. In this chapter, I discuss some of the complexities involved in translating research findings to diverse audiences across contexts, settings, and applications.

The Politics of Witnessing

The praxis of performance is a praxis of reciprocity, of witnessing: “It takes two to speak the truth,” Thoreau (1849) reasoned, “one to speak and one to listen” (in Apfelbaum, 2001, p. 28). As such, the dialogical process involved in telling and listening helps to constitute community: “As a public act, witnessing aims at constructing what Halbwachs (1924, 1952) calls an emotional community” (Apfelbaum, 2001, p. 23). Smith (2001) argues that the stakes are always high in the process of telling and bearing witness: To hear, the listener must acknowledge and risk being unsettled by an unfolding counter narrative that publicly dismantles conventional knowledge. “This,” as Jillien expressed, “is where it gets complicated.”

Performance is complicated because the public telling and hearing of ‘authentic’ experience as a transformative tool is a central but undertheorized component of pedagogies for social change. In Chapter 13 I described the consciousness raising model that is a prevalent approach of many critical, popular, and feminist pedagogies. This model relies on “[the] use of personal experiences as a starting point for creating new, oppositional knowledge” (Srivastava & Francis, 2006, p. 282).

To critically investigate the politics of witnessing, however, we must problematize the assumptions that underlie this consciousness raising model. First is the assumption that educational theatres are inherently transformative. Liberalism, buttressed

by a tendency to pedestal the relationship between showing and knowing ‘truth,’ assumes not only that education can remedy racism and other social problems, but that morality flows from rational thought (Srivastava and Francis, 2006). In their analysis of popular education workshops that used group discussions, role plays, and image theatre, Srivastava and Francis (2006) found that many of these workshops “have limited effect in fostering organizational change, in fact reinforced stratified race relations by enabling White audiences to remain uninvolved” (p. 281). Such workshops problematically rely on ‘authentic’ disclosures of lived experiences by the Other as the basis for an analysis of power relations. While the Other is put on display and becomes the subject of interrogation, audience members of the dominant group are able to act as voyeurs or spectators. Their protected and often passive viewing location can exact a heavy toll on the tellers, who become reproduced as objects of study. Srivastava and Francis (2006) maintain that effective, change-oriented consciousness raising strategies require a specific context of reciprocity, safety, and accountability on the part of audiences.

Clearly, workshops based on critical pedagogies can provide a starting point to examine barriers, but they cannot be applied in isolation, and cannot substitute for more sustained interventions into systemic practices of power inscribed in everyday systems, discourses, policies, and institutions.

Setting the Stage for Change

Just as in our skit development, we set out in our performances to achieve much more than an essentialized, simplistic educational display of stories about the Other. Several key differences distinguished our approach. First, our performances were intended above all as a strategy for reporting back to the girls who had participated in our focus groups. This strategy served as a means to foster knowledge transfer, skill dissemination, and networking. Second, except for one academic conference, our

audiences were not predominantly constituted of members of the dominant group but rather were racialized minority girls and women who, while diverse, shared some measure of common subjectivity. Lastly, PT formed one part of our much broader community development strategy that involved a growing network of girls, practitioners, researchers, and agencies; it was rooted in the Foucauldian notion that

power consists of being able to act, and to act on the actions of others; in other words, a social intervention which turns individuals and groups within a specific society from being the objects into being the subjects of their own history (MacMillan, 2004, p. 64).

As part of a knowledge dissemination and networking strategy, the performance process helped us translate the development of our unfolding critical process into and across different contexts, communities, and applications, in the process making broader and more complex links to policy, research, and practice. This new cycle of TE was not without struggle, however.

Beyond Storytelling

For counter stories to be not only told and heard, but acted on—in other words, to provide a new layer of TE—certain interpersonal and sociohistorical conditions must be present. Each space of encounter requires different discursive and analytical strategies to push audiences beyond the comfortable position of viewer/voyeur and engage them in action. To achieve these goals, our performances had to be compelling, inspirational, troubling, unsettling; they had to transmit knowledge, build solidarity and model resistance. To engage fully with the tensions that would be revealed during the performance process, we had to balance the following elements:

- The aesthetic quality of the production: Is the dramatic content too diluted or essentialized? Are the stories compelling and effective in conveying the message?

- Naming the unsaid: How do we provide a transformative experience in one hour when these experiences are systematically negated? Does critical consciousness emerge out of a theatre production? If so, how?
- Resonance and reliability from the perspectives of many audiences: Since these pieces are grounded in the research teams' voices and focus group data, will the final product resonate with new girls and with other audience members?
- Audience involvement: Who attends and how will we ask them to become involved? How will we respond to and integrate a diversity of audience lenses and viewing positions?
- Witnessing and denial: How will the girls' knowledge be taken up, resisted, denied, supported by audiences? What is the cost and risk to the girls?
- Acting on and beyond the performance: What outcomes will flow from the performance? How will girls become further involved after the performance?

As I demonstrate in my exploration of each of these points, we needed to attend to these questions carefully in order to move the performance beyond simply ephemeral storytelling by the Other.

Spaces of Encounter

Until the performance stage, we had provided a small, safe audience for the girls, with rehearsals carefully debriefed and facilitated. In performance, however, the girls would enter an organic, unpredictable space of encounter. The women researchers would take a back seat, becoming audience members and ethnographers. To facilitate this transition, we developed the performance in several stages. In May 2002, we held a practice session at ICA that was attended by friends, family members, community members, and supporters of the research project. A few weeks later, the girls presented a

partial selection of the skits at an academic conference at the University of Victoria. Our most public performance—and, for the girls, our most highly anticipated—took place at the “It’s About Us” girls’ conference in July 2002.

In total, we performed different iterations of our work in six different venues: two community settings, two girls’ conferences, and two academic conferences.⁶⁸ Each space of encounter involved a new audience, a different cycle of feedback and interpretation, and distinctive politics of witnessing. For the most part, our audiences were constituted of girls, but also included family, friends, and community members; front-line workers, counsellors, teachers, and agency staff; policy makers and government representatives; and academics and researchers. At each performance, the girls encouraged audience members to interact with and respond to the evolving critical stories they had developed through months of concerted effort. The explicit information sharing in public presentations allowed distortions and incongruencies in our own interpretation to be named, challenged, and documented. To engage in this new cycle of triangulation, we relied on discursive means that included forum theatre, small group discussions, and written evaluations. The girls had to hone their ability to critically and strategically read and respond to audience members’ diverse concerns and agendas.

I should also specify that systematically documenting and evaluating the impact of the performances on audiences was not a focus of our study. As such I cannot make consistent claims about the effects of the performance on audience consciousness across performances. Here I present data collected in written evaluations and verbal debriefs during the “It’s About Us” and community presentations, at our final theatre evaluation, and in interviews with the girls’ advisory committee.

⁶⁸ I refer the reader to Chapter 10 for a brief description of the performances.

Test Community Performance

Our test performance with the very supportive ICA audience gave us a first opportunity to evaluate the dramatic and analytical relevance of the performance. It was also an opportunity to invite new participants into our growing network. In this we had some success; many of the practitioners, women, and girls who attended the test performance also attended our summer conference. The following are excerpts from the presentation evaluations:

What did you think of the skits?

I wanted to show this issue to girls. I'm not a girl but I know it's a really big issue for girls. So important to girls. Especially in the lower grades.
(Community audience member)

It would be nice if the girls didn't read their intros, it's distracting we can't see their eyes as much. (Community audience member)

I was so amazed to see those girls up there, it was so real what they talked about, it was like 'this is my life!' (Community audience member)

I liked that we could go up with the actors and try to find some solutions. It was really hard, but at the same time it just shows how life is, how this is like for us all the time, there's just no easy answers and you need people around you who support you no matter what, because racism will always be around. (Community audience member)

Comments by audience members during and after the performances offered important aesthetic feedback, provided a measure of the extent to which the content resonated with the audience, and indicated the depth of community knowledge on the issues. The community feedback showed the considerable diversity in the many possible 'viewing' relationships, perceptions and interpretations between audiences, and actors and their stories. These evaluations were incorporated into our analysis and provided a benchmark to prepare the girls for the more elaborate performances to come.

Academic Performances

The girls' presentations at academic conferences and to predominantly White adult audiences required a different strategy of performance. We could not presume that the academic audiences would demonstrate safe levels of conscientization and reciprocity with regard to the material presented. At this early stage, we wanted to avoid the potentially damaging effects on the girls of being romanticized, tokenized, scrutinized, dismissed or dissected as objects of study. Apfelbaum (2001) argues that rather than experience the discomfort of dislocation, privileged listeners often seek to recast counter stories as performances they can neatly consume and then 'step out of,' reproducing the tokenism and denial that is so dangerous to the performers, especially to young girls sharing their subjective experiences. Privileged audiences also may expect the Other to teach them about colonialism—and to dilute, translate, and provide easy access to their experiences of colonization. Apfelbaum stresses that a refusal to hear is a response to the fear of having one's own epistemological location challenged, of no longer being safe or comfortable, and of being exposed to one's complicity in relations of power. The girls were well aware of the academic 'critical gaze' upon them, as Barbara confided: "It was so weird how they were all taking notes, like they were studying us."

Accordingly, we structured the academic performances to include no unscripted interactive activities such as forum theatre; a question period, carefully rehearsed, followed the skits to allow for critical commentary. As I discussed in Chapter 13, it is critical to anticipate the dynamics of encounter and witnessing that might arise by brainstorming and rehearsing responses to likely audience questions and comments. This process appears straightforward, but it required a tremendous amount of time and preparation. Developing critical responses that empower the 'teller' to subvert strategies of tokenism, denial, and resistance is a key aspect of TE.

“It’s About Us” Conference Performance

The longest and most elaborate performance by far was the presentation at the “It’s About Us” conference. The performance was presented on the morning of the first full day of workshops to a relatively ‘allied’ audience of over 80 predominantly minority and Indigenous girls (ages 10 and over), young women, and women. Many of the young women and women were students or staff at the University of Victoria. As well, girls attended from other girls’ groups in Duncan, Vancouver, and Toronto. Many local practitioners such as counsellors, settlement workers, teachers, and youth workers also attended. This performance was intended as a ‘conversation starter’ or ‘issue namer’ that would serve as an impetus for deeper discussion throughout the conference. It was a creative and dynamic way of introducing our audience to our emerging thematic and analytical overview.

Although we had performed twice already, we had yet to perform the entire production on stage with full staging and lighting effects. This excerpt from my field notes describes our excited anticipation:

We sat backstage waiting for the performance to start; some of the girls were pacing, others silently mouthing their lines. Everyone had dressed up. As we had done together so many times, we held hands in a tight circle and went through our favourite warm-up exercise, building our ‘creative bubble’ within which the girls would speak confidently and proudly. I was comforted by the fact that the girls seemed really grounded; this was the culmination of so many months of difficult work. We all held our breath as they announced the project. The girls came on stage one by one to introduce themselves; they were met with loud applause and cheering. Then, the lights dimmed again and the performance started.

Photovoice

The performance began with the girls’ “Shoot This” photovoice project. Over the course of a few weeks, the girls had snapped photographs to document the spaces and relationships that shaped their experiences as racialized minority girls living in Victoria.

Each girl stepped up to the microphone; as her images flashed on a large screen behind her, she relayed each picture's meaning.

This is a picture of Walmart. This is where I feel the most different in Victoria. (Manjeet, 17)

These are the gates to Chinatown. No matter where I go or what I am, I will always be Chinese. I am very proud of that. (Barbara, 16)

This is my dad's name in Chinese and his birth sign. (Jillien, 16)

This is the Islamic necklace my dad gave us before he went back to Iran. (Prisha, 16)

This is a picture of my friends at high school. This is a very mixed high school. Compared with other schools in Victoria. (Taisha, 16)

To see the girls confidently speak about the memories, images, and stories they had documented was deeply moving. The performance provided the audience with a visceral, visual representation of the contexts within which the girls' stories emerge.

Skits

It was now time for the skits. The girls returned to the darkened stage and took their places under heavy spotlights. Each of the skits was introduced and performed. The girls' performance was, for the most part, flawless, and it moved the audience to laugh, cheer, gasp, and applaud. It is difficult to fully convey each skit; in the following section I address some of the highlights.

Speaking Truths

Naming silences and speaking personal truths requires critical literacy can be difficult for girls who are subsumed in a context of Whiteness and may therefore lack the language to express complex self-representations, as Apfelbaum (2001) describes:

... it is about the (im)possibilities of communicating with others about events that demand witness but defy narrative expression because they are not completely known, grasped, or understood; it is about the readiness and ability to tell, and to hear, about the experience of events which resist simple, straightforward comprehension (p. 19).

However, the liminality of theatric inquiry engenders a level of embodied, visceral healing that reached—and thus conscientized—the girls in a way that intellectualized discussions could not, as demonstrated in the following audience comments.⁶⁹

What I liked best was how we can express situations of oppression through theatre. And I really like the discussion afterwards, hearing what everyone had to say.

Get into more of the acting and expressing yourself because it is quite spiritual. In theatre, facial expressions and body movements can be stronger than words.

A lot of things can't be expressed in essay or picture form, or written, and a lot of things put out like theatre pieces, small components like skin, hair, you can't really express it so well when you're talking about it and theatre expresses things that other mediums can't.

Yeah, it's the action, acting it out. Some people are more visual.

Forum Theatre

The last skit and forum theatre piece was “Popularity,” in which Evelyn is pressured by two ‘queen bee’ friends and a bystander to whitewash her physical appearance in order to look “hot and sexy” for a group of boys. The skit was replayed several times and audience members were asked to yell out “Stop!” at a point in the action where they felt they could intervene with a countering strategy or resolution; then they were invited on stage to replay the scene in an effort to change the outcome. The ‘rule’ was that they could replace any of the actors or create a new character, but their intervention had to be realistic, nonviolent, and reflective of the character’s established personality (e.g., a very aggressive character could not be magically changed into a passive person). At first, the more extroverted girls who had participated in the focus

⁶⁹ These are excerpts from anonymous evaluation forms from audience members in both the community presentation and the girls’ conference.

groups and who knew us volunteered, and then others joined in.⁷⁰ In total, about six girls came onto the stage and attempted different strategies to counter the ‘whitewashing’ that Evelyn experienced. We then debriefed each strategy with the audience.

In forum theatre, both performers and facilitators must enter into a dialectical process of constructing and deconstructing the drama at all times, questioning the audience’s location and not allowing stereotypes to monopolize the characterization. Otherwise, hegemonic responses can disempower individuals and reproduce power plays. The girl actors had trained to remain true to character and, while being respectful of all suggestions, to resist the audience’s strategies in order to provide more realistic and rich depictions. I performed the role of ‘joker’ (Boal, 1979), drawing on Boal’s technique of using a mediator to facilitate the forum process by challenging audience members and provoking discussion. As the joker, it was my job to ‘shake’ the audience out of a passive viewing relationship, to challenge them to avoid clichés and to name the lens through which they were viewing the images on stage. If audience members engaged in Othering, it was important to challenge their interpretations. With an audience of girls, the joker has to be conscious of teens’ predisposition towards dramatized or stereotypical depictions. In my role as joker, I used interrogative questions such as: “Why do the girls say being blond, skinny and having big boobs is so important to being popular? Who doesn’t fit into that? Why? What happens to girls who don’t fit into that? Why didn’t this suggestion work? Why was it so hard? What else could she have said or done? What happens to your sense of worth and self-respect when you can’t change a situation like this? What are the bigger issues here, the bigger barriers? Why are these pressures so strong? Where do they come from?”

⁷⁰ The adults in the audience were deliberately not invited in order to give epistemic privilege to the girls’ voices.

The first girl who came up on stage was Leila⁷¹, who decided to replace Evelyn. Her intervention strategy involved resisting the peer pressure with responses such as “brown is beautiful,” “I love my hair dark,” and “stop it, I don’t want to stuff my boobs.” While this seemed to deter the bystander girl, the two queen bees simply shut her down and continued to stuff her bra, telling her, “don’t be silly,” and “we know how to make you look hot.” During the debrief, the audience concluded that it would be very difficult to act in isolation against a group and against powerful media images, particularly for girls who feel vulnerable or are trying to fit in.

The next girl replaced the bystander girl and tried to exert pressure on the queen bees, but this also had limited results. One of the queen bees backed off, but the other continued to pressure Evelyn. Another girl replaced the pushiest queen bee, wistfully transforming her into an accepting and supportive character. In the debrief, we agreed it was unlikely that this girl would suddenly change her attitude. One of the last girls to come up on stage threatened to “kick some ass” if the girls didn’t “leave her alone,” and the situation quickly deteriorated into a flurry of insults and threats of violence. The audience concluded that this intervention did little to counter the powerful messages that face young women. They also felt that it might place Evelyn in an even more isolated and vulnerable position, perhaps triggering a cycle of violence that would affect her life for weeks or months to come.

In our very limited forum theatre time frame of twenty minutes, many of the layers and complexities involved in this skit remained unaddressed. One message was clearly conveyed, however: None of the interventions succeeded in restructuring dynamics of hegemonic Whiteness, gendered racism, heteronormativeness, and peer

⁷¹ Leila left the “It’s About Us” project but remained actively involved in other aspects of the conference.

pressure. The girls concluded that it would take much more than words and individual actions to reverse the powerful codes of belonging they encounter each day.

The Illusion of 'Solutions'

Certainly our audiences were compelled, inspired, even transformed in the magical moment of performance, but how does dramatic inspiration become actualized into sustainable change? Despite the positive responses, and although the material resonated with the girls and fostered further discussion and sharing, the transformative power of a one-hour theatre piece is clearly limited. Nowhere were these limitations more evident than in the performance of "Popularity." There are several explanations for this. First, performances are often hedged with limiting conventions and frames; efforts to make marginalized audiences 'safe' in a context of risk and denial also limit their ability to really challenge assumptions and stereotypes. Schecter (2003) argues that "the semiotics of performance must start from, and always stand unsteadily on, these unstable slippery slopes, made even more uncertain by the continuously shifting receptions of various audiences" (p. xix). Second, the challenge of forum theatre lies in the need to quickly and clearly convey a complex problem in which audiences can intervene. Disconnected from their contexts—in our case, the complexity inherent in the life of a minority girl—such skits run the risk of becoming overly dramatized, diluted, and superficial.

It is frustrating when trying to perform theatre, that there is a constant need for a 'solution'; these issues are so big and we have to minimize it so we can fix it, but then it dilutes the actual context. (Community audience member)

It started off being very realistic in the skit itself and then people I find went up, they were making it more and more less realistic until it got to the point where no one would ever do that in your life. (Advisory debrief)

Yeah, the issue is just too big. (Advisory debrief)

There is only one of you, you won't be able to fight that. (Advisory debrief)

We hoped that the girls' attempts to intervene would reveal the fallacy of addressing systemic issues with one-dimensional, individualized strategies rooted in simple binaries. Here was another impetus to construct a more complex transdisciplinary model of minority girlhood. The girls understood that moving beyond the caricatures of popular culture, away from obvious or predictable explanations or depictions, required a textured, multifaceted, integrated response. Because we intended the forum piece to spark reflection and discussion, this level of awareness was a realistic achievement, providing important insights and good building blocks for the rest of the conference. We encouraged the girls to expand their reflections in the small discussion groups and workshops that followed the performance.

Feminist Audiences

Sometimes spaces that are presumed to be safe and 'allied' become the most contentious. One gap in our performance related to the conundrum of bridging an academic feminist analysis with girls' perspectives. The academic and conference audiences included feminist activists and scholars from the university who were particularly critical of the heteronormativeness depicted in "Popularity." Their concerns brought to the fore erasures and sites of tension within our group around the issue of queerness; although some members of the research team knew that some of the girls in the group identified as queer—we had even started a skit on these issues in our "Voices Heard" group—our efforts to encourage them to bring their experiences to light on stage were typically met with resistance. In the end, we elected to present the girls' voices in the manner they chose, overriding the filter of a critical analysis, and the audience called us on this. In retrospect, we could have taken steps to sensitively broach the issue and to name our limitations more transparently. For example, we might have enlisted the help of

a young woman who identified as queer and who would have been willing to model open discussion by coming on stage and introducing the issue into her intervention.

It bears repeating that PT is not inherently transformative or critical. Oppressions are never uniform, nor do they produce a natural empathy or solidarity across markers of difference. As much as PT provides tools to contest and challenge codes of belonging, it can also be used to silence dissent, resist change, reify the status quo, and reassert rules and boundaries. In this case, heteronormativeness was part of the girls' survival strategy. Some of the young women at the conference expressed that in a predominantly White city like Victoria they already felt physically marked as Other; we heard comments such as "I couldn't bear to be both 'brown' and 'queer' in a city like Victoria." One young woman confided: "It's like too many strikes against you." She reflected on the way that her own and her friends' sense of identity was carefully managed with the knowledge that it is not safe to contest too many boundaries of normativeness. Here again, it was difficult to name, let alone engage with, sensitive topics in a public forum where the girls were incredibly conscious of safety, anonymity, and the pressures of community gossip. As Taisha commented, "my dad would probably hear about anything I say here by tonight."

A broader issue here is that the women's concerns that the performance's analytical edge simply did not go far enough reiterated ongoing tensions between women's and girls' feminisms. Here again we see reproduced a familiar push and pull between women who want more theorization and girls who want a performance on their own terms, between women wanting to take over and 'feed' the girls a certain analysis without providing space for dialogue, and girls who are fiercely protective of their space and who may resent women's critical interventions in their social realities. Breaking out of this power struggle requires a praxis of TE that is both girl-centered and theoretically sharp. Crafting such a praxis would require transgenerational collaboration, solidarity, listening, and community building—all of which supports my earlier point that

comprehensive social change requires spaces of encounter beyond those provided by performance and conferences.

Curry Rice

Our shortest but perhaps most well-received skit was “Curry Rice.” This piece provided the girls with opportunities to contest their own assumed insertion into preconceived categories. The following comments from the girls’ advisory committee debrief (speakers are not specified in transcript) demonstrate how the skit resonated with the girls’ unspoken knowledge about multiple expressions of lateral and horizontal gendered racisms.

What was your favourite skit and why?

Curry Rice. I think Curry Rice, I thought of small comments that are said every day in schools and whatnot. And yeah, I do find people saying that, they might be joking but it still hurts.

You kind of start to realize that, especially the ones like Curry Rice, you start to realize that like, I thought I was the only person who knows subtle racism and like the things that people say and they took anything that anyone could possibly say just put it out in the open and I think for some people that was really shocking.

People, they totally think that but they don’t say it out loud, it’s inappropriate.

But I’m sure for a lot of other people, it was like, of like “oh, like, it’s not just me” kind of thing. This actually does exist and it’s not just an underlying thing.

Digging Deeper: Locational Specifics

Theatre reveals the sites where girlhoods are performed; it makes them manipulable, thus deconstructable. By providing a dialectic of tension, the performance encourages girls to engage with ambiguity and contradiction to highlight the diversity and commonalities of their experiences of growing up under Whiteness. The “Curry Rice” skit provided the most dramatic demonstration of the diversity that exists among the girls.

Some of the First Nations girls stated that in their neighborhoods and schools, such an exchange would necessarily escalate into physical violence. One girl stated that “it would never just stay at that level of words, we wouldn’t just take that.” Conversely, a South Asian girl who lived in a smaller rural community near Victoria commented that this situation would be unrealistic in her town because there were not enough minorities of any kind for stereotypes among different groups of Asians to create spaces of encounter where these politics of location could be explicitly named and contested. Meanwhile, Asian girls from Toronto and Vancouver provided yet another reading, one grounded in a very different experience of lateral or horizontal racisms among Asian communities, by sharing that they were more preoccupied with differences and tensions around class, origin, skin colour, family heritage, gender, and ethnic and religious affiliations within what they perceived as their own communities. This experience again emphasizes that in larger cities, the nuances and politics within any community are much more visible, in some cases amplified because they cannot be so easily subsumed under dominant Whiteness and discourses of multiculturalism.

These examples illustrate that girls’ individual psychosocial development, histories, and social locations directly shape their cultural knowledges and strategies in relation to their experiences of racialization. The point of our performance was not to resolve this diversity but rather to make manifest multiple meaning makings. Alexander and Mohanty (1997) underscore the need to capture and document such tactical manoeuvres as politically and psychically important for producing new modes of consciousness. The importance of a sense of ‘collective memory’ was also observed by the girls’ advisory group (speakers not specified in transcript).

It’s like every stereotype that anyone has about anyone was in that skit, I thought it was really true to life, like I hear people say that kind of stuff all the time, most of the time they’re just joking but how far does it have to go before it’s like a joke or actually being racist, they’re just ignorant so they feed into the stereotype, that’s why they exist in the first place.

I found myself relating more to “A Day in the Life,” it shows the pressure for us, like teachers, shows that there’s pressures in every part of life, it shows what it’s like to be a minority. It shows you how to fight back too.

In this project, it was how you guys talk about racism and stuff like that, that just came across as an eye opener. Of all the racist comments, kind of symbolized what I had experienced and what I’d been through.

The strength of the TE process is the augmentation of the spectrum of strategies available to girls. Girls bring a tool kit of tactical manoeuvres to dealing with everyday experiences; their strategies are remarkably varied and are adapted to their particular conditions and contexts. Girls in the audience had an opportunity to witness rituals that help other girls to contest the fragmentation and distortions in their lives. As these critical manoeuvres of self-naming and contestation were revealed through critical performance, they entered collective memory, adding another layer to the process of TE.

Moving Beyond the Stage

Because PT’s uses have run the gamut from social control to revolution, we could never assume that our approach would be inherently engaging or transformative. In fact, in some instances, it was not. The transformative outcomes of PT are always emergent; prefaced by the dialectics of location and identity politics, performance opens up contentious spaces. Clearly, the PT performances were only one aspect and outcome of the spectrum of TE. But my research findings nonetheless demonstrate that PT (along with other expressive methods) is an effective -if imperfect- methodology for making visible and applicable girls’ broad range of cultural knowledges of being made and of making selves. In turn, the social contexts in which these experiences emerge shape girls’ levels of conscientization and agency and thus their ability to be transformed and engaged through the process of PT.

Our lack of comprehensive data on the effects of the performance across audiences makes it difficult to assess the potential of performance to nurture TE in other

areas of the audiences' lives. It seems that for some, the experience did work to provide a foundation that was explored in the conference workshops and in future Anti-dote events, as expressed here by reflections from some of the girls who continued their involvement in the project.⁷²

I really liked our discussions, and meeting new people; I like feeling creative, learning new skills, and sharing my experiences, that's why I came after.

Yeah, I did see like so much in common with those girls, I would definitely come back to another meeting or whatever, keep doing it.

TE is clearly contingent upon each girl's readiness, ability, and willingness to become engaged. As one important element in a larger process, PT set the stage by opening up access to a community, to language, and to strategies for action. After the conference, our community widened to involve more and more girls and women, allowing us to refine our theoretical analysis and our praxis of social change. This momentum eventually resulted in the creation of Anti-dote. Thus, while PT set the stage, principles of FPAR and community development moved the action beyond the stage—and into another cycle of transformative engagement.

⁷² Captured at our final girls' advisory debrief.

CHAPTER 15:

**FROM THE STAGE TO SOCIAL CHANGE: REFLECTIONS ON THE
TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MARGINALIZED METHODOLOGIES**

Claiming is hard work. In a sense, colonialism has reduced [us] to making claims and assertions about our rights and dues. It is an approach that has certain noisiness to it. [We], however, have transformed claiming into an interesting and dynamic process for reclaiming” (Smith, 1999, p. 143).

This chapter summarizes the middle loop of my Interpretive Spiral Model (ISM). In this middle stage of fracturing, counter, and historicized analyses, I explicated four intersecting strategies of transformative engagement (TE) arising from the development and delivery of a multi-method popular theatre (PT) production within a girl-centered community feminist participatory action research (FPAR) project. I illustrated that the use of expressive, participatory, action-centered methodologies acted as a vehicle to carry girls from one level of TE to the next. I demonstrated that under the right conditions, girls’ sense of power, critical consciousness, and oppositional agency is deepened, extended—in effect, transformed—through their involvement in and control of a praxis of *border crossing, community building, knowledge production and dissemination, and social action*.

Through the ISM, my interpretation of the data systematically addressed current debates about ownership, power, accountability, sustainability, and participation in PAR and PT. These debates remain at the center of my uneasy relationship with transformative claims. I have continuously asked: What *does* it take to unsettle the “unfulfilled promises” (Smith, 2004) of transformative research? Does adding ‘feminist’ or ‘girl-centered’ to PAR and PT really alter and expand their focus, dilemmas, processes of knowledge production, and analysis? The strategies, design, framework, and methodologies I have described in each chapter are useful tools and starting positions, but

they are not intended as a panacea. Their effectiveness in supporting TE is determined in context, by their specific circumstances and applications.

In this chapter, I summarize the overarching lessons that can be gleaned about the capacity for expressive, participatory, girl-centered, action-oriented methodologies to support the emergence of TE ‘beyond the stage.’ We hoped, with “It’s About Us,” that the incorporation of increasingly diverse participants and applications would result in new outcomes for our growing community. Here I summarize our success in reaching several key milestones to support this goal. I clarify the links that can be made between the transformative subjective experiences of project participants (and, to some degree, of audience members) and a sustainable, broader process of community building and social change.

Middle Interpretive Loop: A Summary

Because “It’s About Us” was participant defined and continuously evolving, we had no way to preconceive its outcomes. In the preceding five chapters, I critically assessed this iterative process to construct a functioning model of TE that considers two basic questions: How, and with what outcomes, did the girls engage in feminist participatory action research? And, what was transformative about their engagement?

Application of the Interpretive Spiral Model

To answer these questions, in my middle interpretive loop, I enacted several criteria for critical and transparent analysis: the presentation of data gathered through persistent multimethod observation; triangulation by multiple sources and methods; and the analysis and expression of difference, ambiguity, and contradiction through ‘negative case analysis,’ the search for and explanation of examples that are incongruent with dominant patterns in the data (Pretty, 2002). Throughout the application of my ISM, I remained committed to honouring the strength and knowledge of the girls and women

with whom I worked. At the same time, I adopted as an interpretive stance what Wolcott terms ‘rigorous subjectivity’ (1990, p. 133), drawing on, in particular, three interpretive criteria—inscription, micropolitics, and difference—suggested by feminist psychologist Kum Kum Bhavnani (1993). In using inscription, I proposed interpretations of girls’ and women’s lives that reauthor hegemonic narratives. Paying attention to micropolitics entailed an explicit analysis of my own positioning in relation to the other research team members and with regard to my multiple roles as student, researcher, practitioner, and community member. I also worked to meaningfully represent the tensions and messiness—thereby fracturing any misguided sense of cohesiveness and homogeneity in our group, process, design, and findings. My ISM provided me with useful interpretive steps to constructively negotiate the sorts of ontological tensions inherent in community-based research (CBR), and more generally, in speaking from within one’s own community. At the end of this exercise, my model of TE and its diverse outcomes at the personal, interpersonal, and community levels have been transparently documented and my qualified claims about the model’s effectiveness stand substantiated.

The Contexts and Outcomes of TE

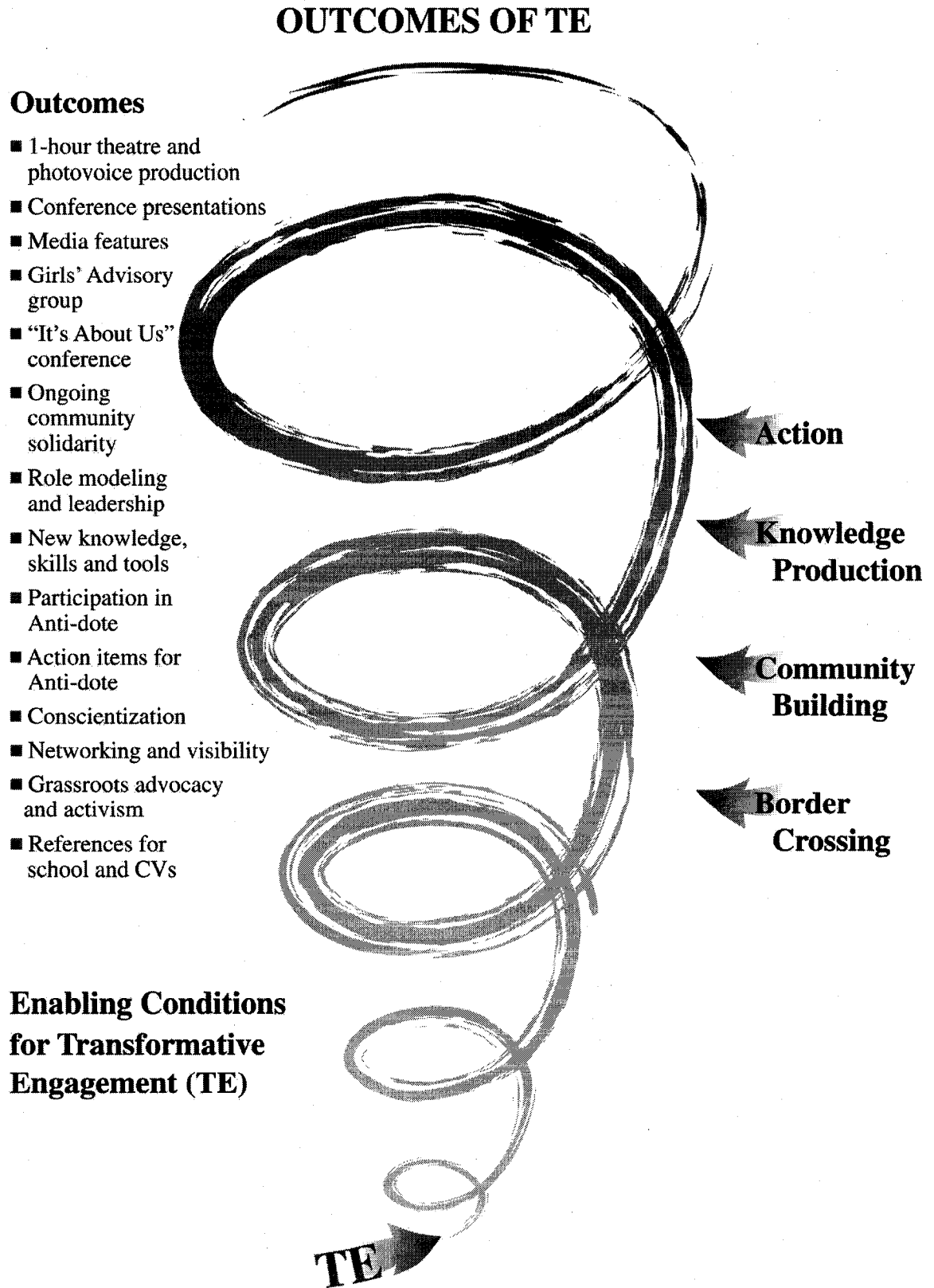
I first set out to document the enabling and hindering conditions, processes, strategies, and outcomes of minority girls’ TE. In the initial chapters of this dissertation, I described the complicated factors at play in determining how minority girls negotiate belonging and exclusion in dominant White spaces, and the rapidly shifting contexts in which these experiences emerge to structure girls’ identity development and, thus, their experiences of TE. Drawing on my transdisciplinary analytical framework gleaned from postcolonial, transnational feminist, youth and girlhood studies, I put forth that minority girls’ engagement is shaped by interlocking historical, sociopolitical, and material forces that structure and, in many cases, jeopardize their civic participation and social inclusion. I then made a case that transformative, feminist, girl-centered methodologies must

respond to these increasingly mobile, asymmetrical, and paradoxical relations of power emerging out of postcolonial contexts. Toward this end, in Chapter 5 I identified key enabling conditions within our own flexible, iterative research design and methodologies that provided the foundation upon which the girls became increasingly engaged in “It’s About Us.”

When transformative community-building imperatives are rooted at a project’s inception rather than pursued as a desirable end or outcome, touchstones and victories may be acknowledged and documented throughout the process, providing networking opportunities that maintain momentum and fuel further engagement. My interpretation of the data in Chapters 10-14 demonstrated that the girls experienced TE on many levels, which resulted in a spectrum of outcomes.

I posited that the complex interplay between transformation and engagement was materialized through four intersecting strategies: (1) border crossing that unsettles exclusionary spaces, resources, skills, and lines of power; (2) the development of safe, strategic communities of belonging and solidarity; (3) the production of disruptive, critical knowledge; and (4) the implementation of actions rooted in the needs of the community. These four strategies gradually deepened and amplified the girls’ existing practices of engagement and resistance, as illustrated in Figure 15.1. This figure relays that the girls developed collective critical consciousness; crossed into institutional and sociocultural realms from which they had been excluded; developed critical counter narratives, skills, and resources; participated in media development, grassroots advocacy and networking; built community and relationships of solidarity; engaged in policy analysis and academic scholarship; helped plan a conference and website; developed a theatre and photovoice production; and engaged in new knowledge dissemination to diverse audiences.

Figure 15.1 The outcomes of transformative engagement.



Through the collective formation of critical consciousness that supported their growing leadership, the girls became engaged as advocates and role models to diverse audiences. In Chapter 14, I relayed how the girls' transformative process transferred, to some degree, to other racialized girls, young women and women who attended the performances. Through participation in a collective process of remembering and bearing witness, many audience members reported that their levels of self-awareness, critical consciousness, and agency were enhanced. More importantly, it connected them to a network and community, providing a foundation for potential further action. These are notable and important successes. The linkages that must occur to support the emergence of TE are not always obvious or straightforward, but neither are they tenuous or untenable if combined with the right resources, supportive context, and committed community and research team.

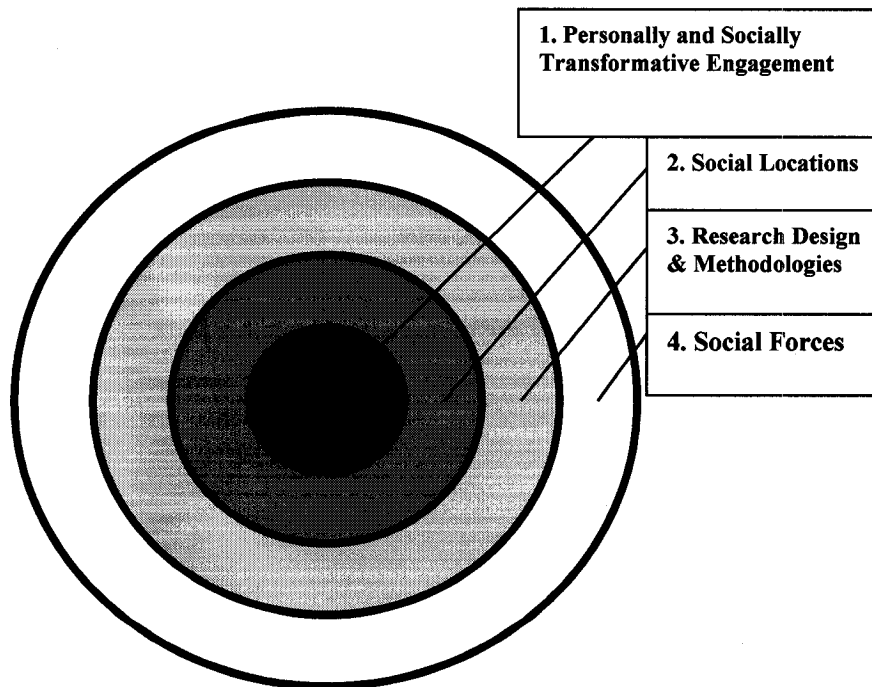
Our PAR process did not stop with the conclusion of our girls' conference, but rather flourished with the inception of Anti-dote. Five years later, Anti-dote remains a functioning grassroots organization, evidence that our broader FPAR project did, in fact, engender a series of sustainable grassroots community initiatives involving a growing community of girls and women, exemplifying yet another successful cycle in the evolution of TE praxis.

The Ecology of Transformative Engagement

To understand the complex interplay between the praxes of transformation and engagement, girls' social locations, the methodologies or approaches employed to facilitate TE, and the broader social forces that structure all of these dynamics, it is necessary to problematize the nestedness of girls' TE in its larger sociopolitical, historical, and economic context. Figure 15.2 depicts TE (represented in the first or center system) at the nexus of three larger interlocking systems that serve to structure girls' practices of engagement and resistance. Unless the power relations that underpin this

dynamic system are adequately conceptualized, discourses of engagement tend to flatten the multiple tensions in minority girls' daily lives, making it difficult to understand what shapes their agency in engaging or disengaging, or what tools and approaches would best respond to their needs.

Figure 15.2 The ecology of transformative engagement.



The second system illustrates that girls' voices and practices of engagement are embedded in their social locations—their experiences as gendered, classed, sexualized, racialized subjects, crafting citizenship and social belonging within dominant White spaces. This system shapes their engagement with each other, with their families and communities, with schools and other institutions, and with broader social discourses related to civic participation, citizenship, social inclusion, multiculturalism, and girlhood. While I conceptualize girls as already active agents who continuously negotiate, manage,

and respond to these tensions, another layer is required for their agency to deepen and expand into the purposeful oppositional agency that characterizes TE.

As illustrated in the third system, the use of expressive, participatory, feminist methodologies provided the context enabling the emergence of TE. As a praxis facilitated through research, TE is directly shaped by the methods used in research, the resources and funding available to support research-based advocacy, and the ways in which findings are disseminated and implemented. Although our experiences with PAR and PT revealed their many inconsistencies, once adapted to our needs they nonetheless provided the transformative discourses and practices that enabled the girls to become innovators and transgressors, as well as for them to remain engaged in an extremely demanding process. In other words, these methodologies provided the tools by which the girls came to understand how power operates and can be engaged subversively to generate social change.

The final system represents the broader social contexts that structure girlhood, which always must be understood in relation to the social, political, and economic hegemonies that constitute girls as particular kinds of subjects, agents, and citizens. I stressed that social constraints on agency do not irretrievably rob girls of the capacity to act, contest, and create change. Scattered hegemonies are pervasive, however, and thus are never wholly malleable or easily changeable by individual actors. Despite the innovations of girls and community members and their insertion of a critical feminist analysis, efforts to support TE are always to some degree constrained; they may also have contradictory effects or reinforce the status quo, for example, as when the “Popularity” skit was read as heteronormative, or when the girls at the conference requested make-up sessions rather than radical poetry workshops.

The Evolution of TE

To account for a multiplicity of challenges, enabling conditions, strategies, and outcomes, my model characterizes TE as a continuum and the process of community development as one of scaffolding. “It’s About Us” started with Jo-Anne’s grant proposal and extended into a researcher-directed focus group study; based on community feedback and involvement, it then transformed into a participant-focused participatory project, and eventually into a community-owned grassroots organization. This journey towards praxis was intricate, indeterminate, and deeply involving. It could be neither easily contained nor straightforwardly prescribed. We were faced with challenges of working within and across borders of age, race, class, language, ethnicity, and nationality; of weaving together diverse and imperfect methodological traditions; and of negotiating different community needs, expectations, and identity politics. Like other advocates of transformative research, we had to contend with the unfulfilled promises of methods and applications grounded in simplistic and undertheorized conceptions of community, participation, and collaboration. We worked within and against methodologies that presume the willingness of participants to engage in research, and their capacity to be neatly inserted into predetermined categories of age, gender, and race. Power was not distributed uniformly or shared consistently. Rather, our ever-evolving, precarious spaces of solidarity were undercut by real-world structural constraints, including institutional liabilities and protocols, time and scheduling constraints, and limited resources.

These hurdles revealed the stratification of age and education; overlapping and sometimes contradictory roles; and the pull of personal, community, cultural, and political allegiances and tensions. In some cases, these tensions were paralyzing, and our responses did not always respect girls’ voices. In other areas, we succeeded well beyond our expectations in setting a foundation for transformation and change. During this process, we also encountered unanticipated personal, ethical, and conceptual dilemmas.

The Otherness within our team had to be deliberately unpacked and renegotiated. Instead of personalizing or essentializing our differences as natural and fixed, thus remaining static within assumed and imposed categories of identity, we acknowledged that we could not immunize ourselves from structural inequities and that fluid forms of colonialism and patriarchy would inevitably be embedded in every aspect of our work. Making our differences and positions within power relations transparent and explicit led to uncomfortable, but necessary and mostly positive, outcomes.

And so our process evolved as many other community-based, collective processes do: We slowly built momentum and arrived at shared understanding through the catalytic tensions within our group and through our interactions with our many personal, institutional, and community affiliations. Throughout, all of us searched for spaces of safety, solidarity, and agency. The difficulties of translating complex theoretical ideas into girl-centered practice were highlighted by the asymmetries between theory, practice, and policy. At times we stumbled in using a theoretical response to relational tensions within the group; at other times, our struggles to align ourselves with an allied sense of purpose generated moments of deeply transformative synergy. These moments were invariably splintered by our collective 'group storming' and our sometimes tenuous renegotiations.

PT provided a useful discursive tool to facilitate this ongoing cycle of merging and fracturing. While flawed, PT techniques enabled us, to some degree, to account for individual and group identities; to acknowledge contextual factors and differences; and to explore dominant, silenced, and contested dynamics within the project itself and within the broader community. Through our research team discussions, performances, and advisory meetings, we triangulated our process from the very first day by continuously engaging, discounting, and/or integrating various accounts, methods, and sources, which in turn helped us to diversify our applications and enhanced the relevance of our

outcomes. As the performances progressed, we refined and adapted our analysis, drawing on the various mechanisms for transparency and intersubjectivity built into PAR and PT.

As I continue to reemphasize, the evolution of TE is by no means a mechanistic or programmable process. It requires multiple 'passes' or loops in its design, analysis, relationships, and actions to give the group opportunities to explore, discard, augment, and complement different ideas and voices, develop transtheoretical analysis, and enhance the scope and reliability of findings and outcomes.

The Conundrum of Participation

If relevant lessons for the field of youth participation can be drawn from my model of TE, it is that absolute participation need not be struggled for at any cost and under any circumstances. I would argue that research goals of achieving unqualified youth participation in every aspect of planning, managing, conceptualizing, delivering, and applying findings often serve more to justify adults' claims about their research designs than to meet the needs of youth. Herein lies the conundrum: In our project, absolute participation was in some aspects detrimental to TE. After some trial and error, we found that a workable spectrum of participation could be tailored to the girls' needs and capacities. For instance, the girls in "It's About Us" preferred to take ownership of the theatre process and were completely uninterested in managing administrative and logistical details. They expected us to provide them with control in certain areas and to manage, on their behalf, less appealing tasks. Formulaic distributions of roles and responsibilities would simply have exhausted the girls and would not have enhanced their evolving needs and skill levels. To achieve the delicate equilibrium between supporting girls and nurturing their self-determination, participatory 'recipes' should not be prescribed for a group. TE is a cumulative process; research teams must take the time to determine how best to scaffold adult involvement around girls' engagement. However, since the balance of power typically favours adults, these strategies must be mutually and

transparently defined and involve a deliberate transfer of power. They cannot be used to further justify limiting girls' opportunities to control their own process or to place external boundaries on their engagement.

Disengagement as Engagement

An important gap identified in my literature review, to which I can now speak through my findings, concerns the erasure of minority girls in the inception, implementation, and evaluation of youth participation. My analysis of TE speaks to the urgent need for a discourse of participation that conceptualizes girls of colour “as dynamic and creative agents in constructing identity and shaping experience, who describe and analyze how they construct a place for themselves, challenge, contest and resist representations and intersecting race, gender and class relations of ruling” (Ralston, 2002, p. 9). Minority girls' disengagement or perceived apathy must be understood to be both symptoms of structurally produced marginalization and important forms of resistance. As argued in Chapter 10, in order to address the needs of minority girls, a model of TE requires a *transformative* element of social change that targets the underlying reasons for disengagement rather than simply quantifying participation or subsuming minority girls into mainstream avenues which, Harris contends, proceeds on the presumption that the only meaningful participation is one that involves engagement in conventional or state-sanctioned avenues (Harris, 2001a). The girls in “It's About Us” were less concerned with accommodating what the literature perceived as their needs than they were with finding a voice and becoming involved in meaningful collaboration and action with other girls ‘like themselves.’ Throughout the data, their reflections demonstrate how their resistance to dominant exclusionary practices of participation is an important tactic for “talking back” (Manjeet), “doing it our way” (Jillien), “being proud of who we are” (Barbara) and “not selling out” (Taisha). Their strategies for producing

change through innovation, opposition, and subversion must be acknowledged as intentional, purposeful, and transformative forms of engagement.

The girls' strategies of dissent, which have been extended and amplified through *Anti-dote*, speak to a growing movement of girls involved in social and institutional change through participation in non-mainstream, grassroots social movements (e.g., anti-poverty, anti-globalization, feminist, queer, anti-racist, anti-colonial, etc.). New girl-centered activisms are characterized by subversive methods and media such as theatre, zines, and on-line blogs. These alternative mediums attest to girls' creative disengagement from mainstream and state-sanctioned avenues for participation. This disengagement is based on the premise that endorsing mainstream avenues is to endorse the status quo, the state, and the structures that subjugate girls' own views on what should be changed and how they want to be included—in brief, how they should function as citizens (Aapola et al., 2005; Harris, 2001a).

I do not mean to suggest, however, that those girls who chose to engage with mainstream policy and research put forth more tokenistic and institutionalized, and therefore less effective, forms of engagement. Some girls felt that engaging with the dominant structures and systems that directly affect their lives constitutes meaningful and important forms of oppositional agency. The critical lesson here is that strategies of TE are most effective in responding to girls' diverse social locations, needs, and contexts when they embrace contradiction and multiplicity. Likewise, a model of TE must take into account the full spectrum of minority girls' engagement, for instance, acknowledging their contributions to ethnocultural activities and grassroots activism as valid and necessary means to build citizenship and social inclusion.

From the Stage to Social Change: Research Outcomes

The ability of PAR and PT to affect policy, programming, and institutional structures typically requires another level of advocacy, including some sort of infrastructure or organizational entity that in our case did not initially exist. One of the most significant outcomes of the “It’s About Us” study is the creation of such an entity—a network of ‘have nots’—which, as Tandon (2002) argues, is a legitimate and important outcome of PAR. Through the formation of Anti-dote, which I discuss in this section, “It’s About Us” moved ‘beyond the stage’ to community-based social action.

At one of our final meetings, the girls of “It’s About Us” generated the following list of ‘urgent action items’ in response to issues identified in their skits and discussions throughout the project.

What Girls Like Us Need in Victoria: Urgent Action Items

1. Diverse studies in schools
 - More courses like “Black history” or representation in history classes
 - Teachers educated about cultures so they can teach kids (e.g., youth workshops in school, discussion groups, educate the mainstream)
2. Funding \$ for concrete solutions (i.e. training and activism)
3. Popular education methods, i.e. theatre groups, peer-to-peer education, etc. (discussions/facilitations/facilitations are therapeutic for us, helps us deal with issues surrounding our identities)
4. Peer-to-peer education: “breaking the cycle of not knowing each other”
 - Have discussions around racism—update the term ‘racism’
 - A place to talk about these issues where this is normal and safe
 - Recognize that it’s hard to talk about racial issues; make it safe; have minorities and girls facilitating their own discussions
 - Radio show “Breaking the Cycle” to reach out
 - Magazines—touch on issues of racial minorities dealing with issues and make it more political; documentary/TV show; more visual—website/art/acting; drop-in center; media training—leadership retreat
 - Make ourselves visible; claim our space; we need belonging
 - A girls’ conference! Age specific
 - Supporting girls that act as leaders
5. More accessible, has to be girl and female focused

This list represents the girls' ability to utilize the space opened up by feminist research and participatory methodologies to develop girl-centered action items for capacity building "on their own terms." The girls clearly call for a number of intersecting strategies for change, including taking up space for collective witnessing (on stage, in workshops, in the media, in classrooms); changes to educational policies and curriculum; increased visibility and advocacy; girl-to-girl spaces and projects; leadership and community-building initiatives; and knowledge production through creative and expressive participatory mediums. Their insightful analysis of structural, material, and sociocultural barriers facing racialized girls in Victoria, and their diverse and creative strategies for addressing them, is the culmination of months of concerted discussion and analysis. "It's About Us" was the foundation for naming and beginning to address these issues; Anti-dote⁷³ has provided the necessary infrastructure and institutional capacity to continue building on the girls' TE and expanding the scope of their voices and engagement.

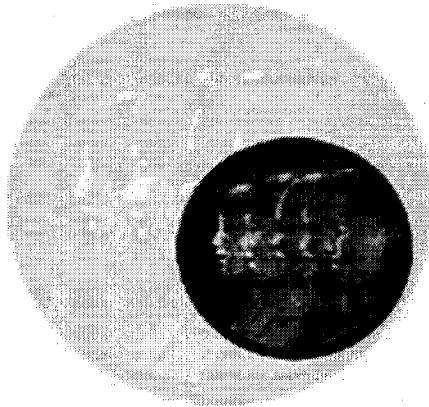
Anti-Dote: The "It's About Us" Legacy

While "It's About Us" achieved multiple outcomes, the formation of Anti-dote is among the most significant. Anti-dote, whose logo is seen in Figure 15.3, emerged in 2002 as a response to the gaps identified by girls, young women, and women who participated in the various phases of the larger research project in which "It's About Us" was embedded. Anti-dote is now a nonprofit grassroots community network of over 100 women and girls of diverse backgrounds, ages, histories, and affiliations committed to increasing the visibility of racialized minority and Indigenous girls and women in Victoria through action-oriented, community-based social change strategies. Through Anti-dote, we have achieved, collectively, the meaningful engagement of a community of

⁷³ www.anti-dote.org

racialized girls and women in Victoria where few opportunities to do so formerly existed—a need that was clearly identified in the early phases of the research.

Figure 15.3 The Anti-dote logo.



In Prisha’s words, the girls in “It’s About Us” are the girls who “started it all!” Barbara, Evelyn, Jillien, Prisha, and Taisha, whose profiles are seen in Anti-dote’s logo (at left), played a key role in contributing a girl-centered strategic vision that shaped Anti-dote’s inception and development. The role modeling and leadership they provided during our project was a significant factor in inspiring other girls to become involved in grassroots community social action. In fact, their list of urgent action items informed the development of Anti-dote’s first grant and programs.

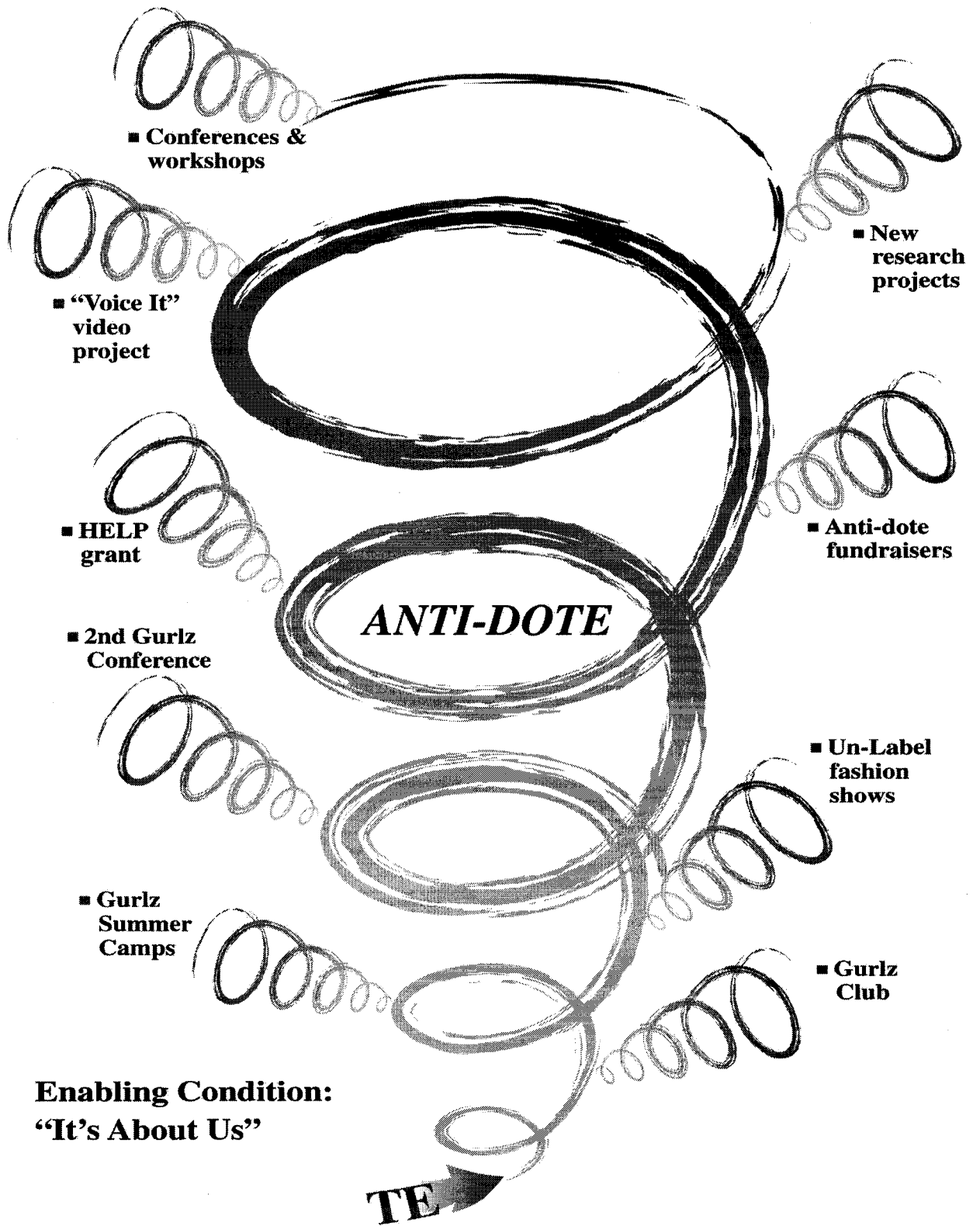
A Transgenerational Network

The Anti-dote network and its membership evolve through our various networking strategies and are characterized by a flexible, multitiered transgenerational structure. Acknowledging that participants of all ages require a diversity of opportunities for support, training, and leadership development, Anti-dote currently has three membership tiers: a ‘Gurlz’ group for those who identify as girls, teens, or tweens; a ‘Sistahs’ group for young women; and an ‘Aunties’ group for those who identify as adult women. These categories are at once fluid and structured; we continually engage in a cautious dance between providing safe spaces where each group can address their specific concerns, and reifying narrow and essentialized categories of identity and belonging. This structure builds on existing capacity by providing ongoing leadership development and mentoring within our network. For instance, some of the girls involved

in the first conference now act as Sistahs and role models to the younger girls, while our executive director, initially a participant and facilitator in our girls' conference, now supervises all of Anti-dote's programs and research projects.

Anti-dote's core membership vets initiatives and supports a wide range of programs and research initiatives (see Figure 15.4). Since its formation in 2002, Anti-dote members have held a second girls' conference as well as successful Un-label fashion shows, a summer Gurlz program, several new research projects, a new website, a video project, and ongoing workshop and conference presentations involving both women and girls (see Appendix 3). As illustrated in Figure 15.4, each of these transitions required multiple entry and closure points and facilitative strategies. Each new off-shoot provides a discursive space for naming and potentially redefining politics of representation and inclusion in Victoria. This in turn creates opportunities for new membership and networking, ensuring the continuity of the research and program outcomes, and continuously creating new ones.

Figure 15.4 Evolution of Anti-dote through enabling conditions of "It's About Us."



I should also highlight that as a grassroots community-based organization that is not state mandated, Anti-dote operates on the margins of civic engagement and on the periphery of mainstream agencies and funding bodies. This ambiguous space holds both promise and threat—our hybrid acts of community advocacy, while successful, remain vulnerable to policy and funding constraints on our activism.

The Continuum of TE Across Participants

TE is not equally measurable or uniform in its effects across participants.

Although “It’s About Us” fostered a shared experience of TE for the girls in the research team, as I have demonstrated, the girls differed notably in their perceptions of the quality of the experience, in their development and application of critical analysis and action, and in their willingness and ability to continue with another cycle of the TE process, namely Anti-dote. It is important not to quantify these different levels of engagement: TE is neither precise nor easily compartmentalized, and no one stage along the TE continuum is more critical than any other. Where the girls were, and how they evolved during the project, reflected their individual readiness, needs, experiences, and goals.

For instance, only Taisha, Manjeet, Prisha and Jillien (Barbara and Evelyn have since moved to Vancouver) remained actively involved in the development of Anti-dote. These four girls represented Anti-dote at numerous conferences (in Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto, among other cities), facilitated community workshops, collaborated on grant development, and took leadership roles in developing the first Anti-dote website—thereby extending their roles beyond those of participant-researchers to advisors, community leaders, advocates, and peer mentors. Five years later, Prisha and Manjeet are in touch with Anti-dote only periodically, while Taisha and Jillien are much more actively involved as Sistahs (no longer Gurlz!), board members and workshop facilitators. Jillien, now a University of Victoria women’s studies student, is currently working with Jo-Anne as a research assistant on one of our new research projects.

To account for the always changing needs and life circumstances of its members, Anti-dote maintains a flexible structure that enables revolving engagement. For example, Manjeet, who had not been actively involved in Anti-dote for the past two years but remains on its Listserv, recently posted an unexpected 'reconnection' email to the entire Anti-dote network. I include it here because it exemplifies her pride in her leadership role in Anti-dote, as well as her perception of the network as a safe and supportive space that can be reentered for support and solidarity:

Hello Anti-dote⁷⁴

You may or may not know who I am. My name is [Manjeet]. I was part of the beginning research of Anti-dote.... I helped organize the first ever Anti-dote conference. I realize I have been out of the loop.... so hello!? I am officially done school now, and would love to be part of Anti-dote again. Recently I just went back home (India), and it really left me thinking. I live in Canada, and I feel as if it isn't home, and then I go to where I come from, and I realize I don't belong even further.... I was still recognized as different. Going home really made me recognize that this outlet of Anti-dote would help me more in life that it already has ... to be pro-active in my struggle. We started so small, and it appears just through the emails that it has reached so many girls. I am really happy about that. I have been to over 5 antiracism summits all over the world, and I have realized that this needs to become pro-active, for those who don't think they belong ... who seek their circle ... who need a voice. I would really like to be a part of this group again. So again, my name is [Manjeet], active anti-racism youth since 2000. Perhaps there are more women on this list serve that are in the same position as me, my original group [names the girls], we started this revolution, we owe it to ourselves to continue this revolution. (Anti-dote Listserv, April 15, 2007)

Manjeet's email reveals several significant points, beginning with her deeply ambiguous sense of citizenship and her ongoing struggle, shared by many of the girls and women of Anti-dote, to develop a transnational, multilocated identity amid essentialized discourses of home, authenticity, and belonging. Also significant is her desire to assert this identity strategically for solidarity building and "revolution." Manjeet's vernacular of

⁷⁴ This email was over two pages long; I have edited it substantially to highlight relevant parts.

identity now includes this notion of herself as an activist social change agent who is very much a part of Anti-dote's community. She seems fully empowered to share her experiences and her voice, publicly and proudly, with a clear vision for change.

As do Anti-dote's multiple off-shoots, Manjeet's email underscores that sustainability is not the only or even the primary barometer of the success of a community-based project. As identified by Manjeet, what is critical to Anti-dote's success is its ability to create multiple levels of engagement and to incorporate members' diverse skills and bursts of commitment into concrete, meaningful actions that build organizational capacity and community momentum. Social change can be enacted through brief, organic, one-time interventions that lead to sustainable outcomes. While these outcomes may be difficult to formally quantify and evaluate, their impact on the community fabric, and their capacity to build skills and networks, may nonetheless be substantial. Sustainability can be defined in many ways, depending on the needs, expectations, and goals of the community.

From Research to Community

We must pay attention to how the emergence of *research*-initiated organizations galvanize community involvement and control to become sustainable and *community* based organizations that, to borrow from Manjeet's words, "continue the revolution." At the beginning of the project, the University of Victoria researchers were centrally involved as technicians of knowledge production; Anti-dote represents the community-building process that transformed this project from Jo-Anne's initial vision, to a community-based, university-driven project, to a community-driven, community-located, and community-paced organization. This process represents a shift from participation to ownership, from PAR as a research economy to a truly social economy.

As a nonprofit community-based organization, we now face new dilemmas: We are a fluid, inherently heterogeneous, precariously assembled network, and even under

the most favourable circumstances, such coalitions require tremendous time and commitment. The sustainability of intentionally grassroots organizations like Anti-dote is constantly threatened by structural and institutional barriers in the form of political gatekeeping, insufficient infrastructure and resources, and the ongoing challenges of working against the stronghold of mainstream positivist research and policy. What keeps Anti-dote and its membership from folding in the face of this incredibly encompassing—and at times completely overwhelming—process of personal and social change, are the deeply comforting friendships we form and nurture through our networking (and of course, our legendary potlucks!).

Researcher Roles

As a board member (and now president-elect) of Anti-dote, my doctoral process has been strengthened and complexified both by my constant movement between multiple locations of power in research and practice, and by my grounding in the Anti-dote community. I understand my part in TE as a praxis of border crossing in which researchers act as facilitators, change agents, knowledge producers, partners, advocates, and community organizers, helping to conceptualize and legitimize our unique approach to social change. Those of us based in academia continue to pursue research grants to fund collaborative action-based research with new groups of girls and women. Our knowledge of policy development, academic networks, and research granting bodies, greatly enhanced by Jo-Anne's ongoing mentoring, supports a foundation for further funding, community action, and knowledge dissemination.

Anti-dote research projects provide new opportunities for coalition building because they draw strength from our ability to reclaim, subvert, and work across assumed borders of identity and engagement. For example, in one of our current studies, we are exploring the ways that 'relationships of encounter' between Mestiza, Indigenous, and

minority girls unsettle the dominant White/Other binary that shapes Canadian discourses of multiculturalism.⁷⁵

Translating Research Findings

I close this chapter by focusing on unique challenges facing feminist community-based researchers who work within their own communities. The role of community-based researchers is to translate the praxis of research into academic codes that can be deciphered and taken up by research institutions, policy makers, academic audiences, and practitioners—crucial work on which communities depend. Because our research grants fund many Anti-dote initiatives, as researchers we are constantly struggling, within limited research budgets and time frames, to bridge these multiple spaces of dissemination, ensure the sustainability of research initiatives, and create new girl-centered applications—all the while remaining connected to the community.

Typical research budgets do not account for this significant juggling; community-based researchers often personally underwrite the costs of truly community-driven research. Because community-based relationships cannot be prescribed, neatly described in findings and outcomes, or easily evaluated in academic CVs and merit assessments, they represent a coauthorship of knowledge that is inconsistent with dominant academic practices. Despite lip service paid to university-community partnerships, we reap few benefits for investing tremendous amounts of resources and time (often years) in community research. It is likely that these institutional gaps will persist until universities develop more comprehensive ways of quantifying, assessing, and rewarding community-based research.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See <http://people.finearts.uvic.ca/~cionson/home/home.html>

⁷⁶ Representing a move in this direction, this year the University of Victoria awarded Jo-Anne a “Women in Leadership” award in recognition of her vision in coordinating “It’s About Us,” her mentoring of faculty and students, and her tireless support of Anti-dote, among other girl and women-centered projects.

Also significant is the difficulty of disseminating and translating research findings in a context where mainstream institutions deny the expressed need for, and recommendations drawn from, research such as ours. On the other hand, when researchers are successful in communicating outcomes and reaching policy developers, they also typically give up control over how their research is used. Research findings may become institutionalized in problematic ways, for example, misread, distorted, or appropriated to fit in with policy goals that are often incompatible with the research and that sometimes result in the reappropriation of our epistemologies.

Another confounding barrier is that our research efforts evolve within and against new iterations of neocolonialisms, which operate through the networks of academia and research and which have an enduring influence on theoretical and practical facets of PAR. The increasing corporatization of universities and, by default, of research funding, has implications for the development and implementation of FPAR and research-based activism. Emerging institutional discourses of community development and knowledge mobilization tend to eschew social justice struggles for a corporate, outcome-based model of university-community partnerships that serve to manage rather than transform systemic power stratifications.

PAR researchers⁷⁷ emphasize that even as notions of participation, participatory research, and development have gained prevalence, they must be consistently enacted and supported by meaningful action, sustainable resources, and procedures and policies to support genuine, long-term systemic change. These distinctions are critical. A project that is truly decolonizing requires, by definition, structural and institutional change and resource redistribution.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Hall (1992a, 1993), Narayanan (2004), and Russell & Bohan (1999).

Conclusion

Implementing decolonizing, girl-centered feminist research within contested dominant spaces can feel like walking a tightrope. On one hand, projects confront a powerful counter current that seeks to appropriate and minimize subversive efforts; on the other, coalitions face endemic lack of resources, schisms between theory and practice, and precarious politics of solidarity and representation. In the emergence and expansion of TE, participants must walk the tensions between healing and subversion, micro- and macroanalysis, theory and action. In this process, familiar but critical questions about power, appropriation, and the potentially exploitative nature of research efforts to support and amplify girls' participation and capacities should be made explicit, even if they can never be fully resolved. Decolonizing, girl-focused, FPAR is never guaranteed by participants' dedication or best intentions, or by the application of emancipatory ideologies and theories, or a feminist framework. Rather, it requires institutional, economic, and political supports; broad expertise; continuous commitment and critical reflection; and a willingness to engage fully with ethical, interpersonal, ontological, theoretical, applied, and logistical challenges and tensions.

"It's About Us" has achieved just that: It has transformed counter-speaking and counter-acting into a deeply situated, innovative, and nurturing community-building process and network, with applications that extend well beyond the abstraction of theoretical elitisms.

CHAPTER 16:
**SITES FOR POSSIBILITY: TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS IN POLICY,
PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH**

Weis and Fine (2004) argue that researchers have an ethical obligation not only to contest and dislodge, but to document “sites for possibility”, those spaces, relations and/or practices in which possibility flourishes” (p. xxi). Indigenous activist Poka Laenui (2002) identifies three important processes or ‘stages’ of decolonization: mourning; dreaming; and commitment and action.⁷⁸ Having proposed strategies for grieving, healing, committing, and moving forward, this chapter involves a different kind of dreamweaving—a conceptual and practical reconstituting or reimagining. According to Laenui, “the dreaming phase is the most crucial for decolonization. Here is where the full panorama of possibilities is expressed, considered through debate, and building dreams on further dreams, which eventually become the flooring for the creation of a new social order” (p. 155). And so I enter into the final stage of my Interpretive Spiral Model (ISM) to consider the contributions of the research and the implications of the findings for increasing the relevance and resonance of feminist girl-centered research, policy and practice.

A New Nomenclature of Girlhood

The research described in this dissertation contributes to the emerging field of girlhood studies and to debates across disciplines regarding the social inclusion, citizenship formation, and engagement of girls. Racialized minority girls are among the fastest growing demographic populations in Canada. Despite their increasing visibility in the demographic composition of Canadian society, minority girls are made vulnerable by

⁷⁸ I am indebted to Daniel Scott for first introducing me to theories of postcolonialism and specifically to Laenui’s work.

their persistent invisibility in policy, research, and practice. Central to my analysis has been their experiences of exclusion, belonging, engagement, and resistance under dominant Whiteness. In a context of structural disengagement, minority girls have fewer opportunities to use their unique social capital to negotiate, on their own terms, the development of participation, leadership, and socio-cultural capital. As discussed in Chapter 3, these gaps are reflected in various indicators of social exclusion; poverty, social isolation, and experiences of discrimination all have negative impacts on the mental health, well-being, and educational and economic outcomes of Canadian racialized minority girls. The literature reviewed in this dissertation and the findings of the research underscore just how fragmented our knowledge is of the strategies minority girls employ to engage in the many ‘worlds’ they inhabit. My analysis illustrates how various tools can be combined and used in new ways to disrupt and to provide alternatives to the prevalent, and often unquestioned, use of static, definitive models.

Girls’ developing ability to resist and subvert systems of domination is deeply subjective and individualized, and, at the same time, is constrained by powerful social forces. Fine (2004) observes that “the cumulative constraints on [girls’] lives masquerade as freedom and autonomy. Such well-crafted moments of both/and/between, domination and resistance, force us to retheorize ‘choice’ within conditions of enormous constraint glamorized with neoliberal commodification” (Fine, 2004, p. xv). As Walkerdine (1988) observes,

the voices of the oppressed are not simply left out of the system. Rather, [the system] regulates what a child is, and children of outsider groups (and all girls) respond in a number of contradictory ways. The critical educator has to understand how ‘particular children live those multiple positionings’ (p. 228-229).

Growing concerns with minority girls’ social exclusion and social roles, in the context of a rapidly changing—and in many places, unraveling—social fabric, carry with them serious implications of how their voices and engagement may be supported. Yet the

very disciplines that might contribute effective strategies, such as PAR, postcolonialism, applied youth work, girlhood studies, or transnational feminism, are themselves constituted historically, materially, and discursively; thus they suffer from their own gaps and erasures. These gaps affect our ability to articulate a psycho-sociopolitical analysis by which we might respond to the complex shifting grounds that girls inhabit.

Most salient is the disconnection between the meta-theoretical conceptualizations of postcolonialism and transnationalism, and the applied field of youth and girl work. While the latter overpsychologizes, obscuring historical, material, and structural barriers to engagement, the former oversociologize, negating the powerful roles that interpersonal relationships play in the act of bridging conceptual and practical barriers with girls. Hence the argument from girls that both one-dimensional, universalized practices *and* jargonistic, dogmatic theories are disassociated from their needs and realities.

Walkerdine reminds us that the constitution of girls' subjectivity is "not all of one piece without seams and ruptures" (Walkerdine, 1988, p. 204). Their identities can never be as neatly demarcated as their definitions in theory, policy, and practice imply. Rather, they are diasporic, transnational, hyphenated, and overlapping, produced at the nexus of multiple, contradictory, and intermingling systems (Hall, 1997). The impacts and real outcomes of shifting postcolonial formations on girls are not universal nor unidimensional. Global change is both tremendously absorptive and adaptable; it amplifies vulnerabilities and inequities at the same time that it creates new avenues for resistance and solidarity. Notions of citizenship and belonging that are premised on the imposition of borders to create nation states and rooted in official discourses of multiculturalism do not help us capture the experiences of girls who maintain the multiple affiliations I investigated in my study. Conceptually mapping the interactions of these systems, however, might yield the basis for a praxis of resistance.

A Conceptual Crossroads

And so we are at a critical crossroads. Discourses that presume fixed identities and universalisms about 'what girls need' or 'how girls' participation contributes to democracy' constrain the potential for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to work with minority girls to renegotiate their social belonging and citizenship. Because so little social or political space is provided to enable minority girls to engage beyond the status quo, their political dialogues are frequently shut down by dominant discourses of civic participation and multiculturalism.

A reformulation would better document how girls forge their identities in a context of discrepant norms and practices; we must understand the ways these coalesce, and the ways that girls interpret, contest, consume, and act out these norms. In doing so, we unsettle that desire to speak of the homogeneity and universality of identity formation and agency, which can only lead us to further fractures of girls' voices and shallow anecdotes of unfinished, ambiguous transitions from one form of colonialism to another. A reconceptualization is necessary so that we may form and implement marginalized methodologies, broaden our epistemological choices and support girls' peripheral strategies of engagement.

Disciplinary Cross-Pollinations

Forging conceptual translations through disciplinary cross-pollinations is an important first step. I have demonstrated that girls' transformative engagement is better understood and facilitated at the nexus of multiple practices, theories, and strategies. A disciplinary nexus enables practical, meaningful, engaging applications that relate to the everyday experiences of girls. It helps us document how girls' identities are forged at complex intersections of international, transnational, and national politics, domestic multicultural and immigration policies, and dimensions of race, sexuality, ability, class,

and gender as they play out in everyday life. These intersections directly influence how girls engage with multiple ethnicities and identifications, feminism, research, and, of course, girlhood. Our models must be correspondingly complex in order that we may highlight iterative relationships between theoretical abstractions and girls' lived realities.

The difficulty of coming to this analysis from both ends is that we risk collapsing one into the other, by working either exclusively inward (into individualized and decontextualized psychological processes), or exclusively outward (outlining abstract global tensions, economic shifts, historical trajectories, etc.). In this regard, I have argued that postcolonial theories, while inherently diverse, contested, and partial, provide useful 'sites for possibility' as a vehicle for resistance and subversion:

Although we do well to remember its origins, and remind ourselves that post-colonial theory is not a grand theory of everything, its usefulness to other disciplines, and its usefulness as a framework in which post-colonial intellectuals can intervene in Western dominated discourses have become evident. The theoretical issues raised by post-colonial theory: questions of resistance, power, ethnicity, nationality, language and culture and the transformation of dominant discourses by ordinary people, provide important models for understanding the place of the local and of global hegemonies in an increasing globalized world (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 151).

Using postcoloniality as a bridge-building theory, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin suggest, enables us to make visible political and historical lines of power within the postcolonial order. However, we must also guard against relegating all responsibility to outside or abstract forces. We need to be just as concerned with describing girls' individual, contextual *responses* to postcolonial and transnational forces as we are to documenting the forces themselves. Psychosocial models drawn from the applied field of youth work enable us to refine the abstractions of postcolonial and transnational feminist theories to create more precise and meaningful conceptual tools. The Interpretive Spiral Model created and demonstrated in this dissertation is intended to do just that: It illustrates how a transdisciplinary model might be applied to oscillate back and forth,

iteratively uncovering the textured linkages between psychosocial and sociological theories. This process involves a “continuous dialectical tracking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring both into view simultaneously” (Messer, Sass, & Woolfolk, 1988, p. 239). Only by engaging much more fully and critically with the paradoxes and asymmetries of transnationalism, globalization, postcolonialism, girlhood, and transgenerational engagement can we arrive at a destination girls can identify with.

The kind of multilayered, historicized analysis I advocate is tricky to achieve: A conceptual translation and subsequent ‘wraparound’ starts with foregrounding girls’ ‘subjugated knowledges’ and drawing on these strategically in research and practice. This requires open engagement with girls’ feminisms and their practices of engagement and resistance. And, it most certainly calls on us to become critical ethnographers of ambiguities within our discourses and histories of practice and research. Counter stories, as Harris et al. (2001) exhort, “have the complexity of lived experience at their heart—they resist simplistic understandings in favour of complicated, morally ambiguous and sometimes messy analyses of privilege and domination” (p. 9). It is precisely this messiness and incongruence that deserves analytical attention as a potential and important site for possibility.

Girl Feminisms

As feminist politics wage on in the realm of academia, girls continue to engage out of the reach and despite the formal arenas of ‘feminist’ theory. In the process, girls are crafting a new nomenclature of girlhood, engagement, and feminism, as Bulbeck (2000, cited in Aapola et al., 2005) observes:

The same circumstances which have seen girlhood become a receptacle for social anxieties about change have also seen new possibilities, places

and modes for their feminist theory and practice. It is in these other spaces and through these other expressions that may emerge “a ‘new feminism’ we do not yet know (p. 216).

New sites and tools of girls’ feminisms—media such as underground zines, blogs, and web videos—have much to contribute to a feminist praxis that eschews theoretical paralysis. The girls from “It’s About Us” contribute to this growing movement of a feminism that moves from a “language of critique” to a “language of possibilities” (Lalik & Oliver, 2005, p. 98). These feminisms keep fluid and flexible notions of theory and practice at the forefront; they are self-critical, grassroots, multiple, hopeful, and subversive. They shed light on the varied cultural knowledges that enable minority girls to move within and across the “scattered hegemonies” of media, popular culture, and educational, immigration, family, and community systems. As such, they make visible the inadvertent collusion with colonialism and with patriarchies that is embedded in feminist praxis. Indeed, it seems that these emerging feminisms are already working across multiple divides and are thus already transdisciplinary and transconceptual: “Young women’s feminist praxis is marked by the following features: acknowledging differences within and between groups of people, understanding racism, homophobia and sexism as interconnected, acknowledging ascribed meanings as opposed to assigned labels” (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 210).

Beyond Disjunctures: The Other on her Own Terms

Because girls choose not to homogenize, sanitize, or aestheticize their identities and how they enact them in interaction, they offer leadership to shift us out of our “habitual formations” by “developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity, a new vision for scholarship” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79). These strategies are also necessarily multisited and shape-shifting, as Battiste points out:

Decolonization is not one site of struggle but multiple struggles in multiple sites. Thus, these diverse struggles cannot simply be reduced to

singular, one-dimensional solutions. Interventions and transformative strategies must be correspondingly complex, and they must be able to engage with, and react to, the multiple circumstances and shapes of oppression, exploitation, assimilation, colonization, racism, genderism, ageism, and the many other strategies of marginalization (p. xxi).

It is to these multilayered contradictions and paradoxes that we must turn our analytical focus in order to craft more complex feminist ontologies. As we dismantle the coherence of assumed and preconceived interpretive patterns to create a deeper-layered, richer-textured nomenclature, and if we are to use it to galvanize community building, we must expose the gaps in our critical language, and highlight the lines of power that permeate our work. As academics, we exist both within our discipline and in opposition to it, building knowledge through academic apparatus that both enables and constricts, institutionalizes and innovates. These roles are constantly jostling for privilege. The work of countering—and thus a more complex and representative feminist praxis—demands that we engage *with*, rather than *despite*, *around*, or *against*, tensions and differences as loci for dialogue. To become critical auto-ethnographers, feminists need spaces where they can articulate the tensions within their own social and political spheres without those tensions imploding. Most importantly, our terminologies must be expansive enough to speak to the implications of girls' disengagement from feminism, and must support sites for new feminist work.

Conclusion

There is indeed no mythical solidarity that unites racialized, colonized women and girls. However, research can bring about a purposeful one, to create what Holston calls spaces of “insurgent citizenship” (Holston, 1997, in Pratt, 2002). Even as we identify with and work to organize our praxis of resistance around them, we acknowledge that our subjectivities do not make for a natural affinity group of foundational identity. Instead, we are bound to work from what Spivak (1996) describes as “strategic essentialized-

relativisms” and Bannerji (2000) terms “oppositional/coalitional” identities. These strategic locations enable us to speak of and from our relational positionalities—not as authentic or essentialized, but as they shift and are enacted differently and contradictorily across locations, contexts, and projects.

Transformative engagement is ultimately an exercise in resisting the dichotomies inherent in theory, policy, and practice, and between formal and informal knowledges. It is about moving forward despite uneasy compromises and uncertainties, stepping beyond disjunctures and the need to fill in the blanks. TE is enabled when we risk navigating within and across paradigmatic and epistemological fissures. Transformative action research, informed by expressive, girl-centered tools such as storytelling, theatre, and community action, involves a kind of ritual agency. By speaking for ourselves, we elicit reciprocity, we make ourselves accountable publicly. Most importantly, we put ourselves in a position to engender real transformations. These are the promises of our new feminist ontologies: a deliberate fragmenting and augmentation of the spectrum gets woven through our insider knowledges, our communal memories. TE praxis is, after all, about dreamkeeping of a new kind. It uses research to respiritualize, to insist on the continuities and connections, and to rupture the silences that anesthetize the border crossings, the sites of historicized tugs of war. For this, we must do more than mourn and grieve; we must encourage communal restorying and create new mythologies of healing and resistance.

There *is* a lot at stake here. We are a part of the communities we research and work with and our consciousness is indeed bound up in their fate, their wellness, their dreamwork. Because of this, we learn to harness the ways in which we *are* the research, because research matters to us in all the ways in which we also care about decolonizing our communities and our own daily lives. Because, after all, *it's about us*.

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APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs of the "It's About Us" theatre project and girls' conference



"It's About Us" Conference, University of Victoria, Summer 2002



First Anti-dote 'Aunties' Group



“It's About Us” participants having some fun.



“It's About Us” Girls Advisory Committee

APPENDIX 2: THEATRE IMAGES

Building the Group: Introductory Theatre Exercises (images by Eva Campbell)



Warm-up exercises

Warm-up exercises



Trust-building games



Using image theatre to explore themes

Using image theatre to explore themes

Building Skits



“Popularity”: Evelyn is peer pressured



Preparations for “A Day in the Life”



“Curry Rice”



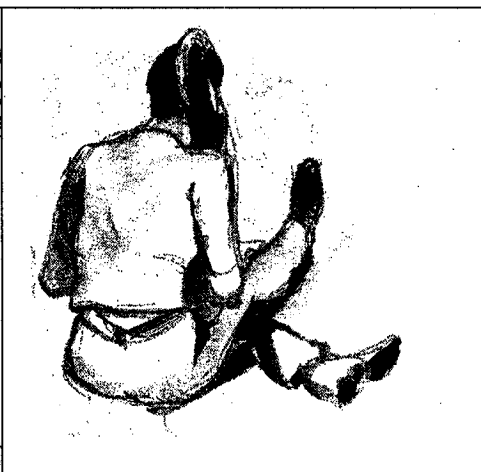
“Curry Rice”

All images are by Eva Campbell

Developing Scripts



Group comfort/building community



Journaling/writing stories



Group check-in



Practicing scripts together

All images are by Eva Campbell