

**“REDEFINING CANADIAN”: A PARTICIPATORY  
FILMMAKING, ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT WITH  
IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH**

by

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Bachelor of Science, University of Victoria 1995

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## ABSTRACT

Short filmmaking is explored as a site for immigrant and refugee youth to participate in ethnographic research, collaborative community inquiry, and media activism. The *Redefining Canadian* project took place over 9 months in 2004 and was a partnership between lead video mentor and research facilitator Joah Lui, the Multicultural Youth Circle Action, the Immigrant Services Society, and Video In Studios. Utilizing experimental, documentary and dramatic aesthetics, the youth created five films that problematize the stereotyped representations of youth, and especially immigrant and refugee youth, in both mainstream society and its news media. The use of digital film technology within a participatory action research framework and a safe, creative environment, enabled these youth to access their imaginations, cultures and experiences and communicate their ideas through an expressive medium. The project opened spaces for intercultural learning and communication and serves to further the legitimacy of art and video as research tools.

## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the hardworking volunteers and staff of the *Action Research eXchange* (ARX) at the *Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group* ([www.sfpirg.ca/arx](http://www.sfpirg.ca/arx)).

ARX is a group which has been actively promoting socially-relevant and action-based, participatory research among *Simon Fraser University* students since 2002. Through organizations such as ARX, it is possible to imagine and advocate for stronger and more responsible connections between academic research and community action.

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## GLOSSARY

*Video, Film:*

The descriptive nouns video and film are used interchangeably throughout this writing. At times, the use of 'video' is preferred while including a reference to the element of the digital video medium. At other times, 'film' may be preferred when referring to the idea of a visual story.

*Youth participants,  
MYCA youth, youth  
filmmakers:*

Identifiers for the group of youth who were participants of this project. The terms are used interchangeably throughout this writing.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Mainstream media misrepresentations of cultural minorities and youth work against cultural harmony, integration, and the democratic uses of the media. People with non-white, ethnic backgrounds are consistently portrayed as gangsters, criminals, terrorists, drug users, violent, untrustworthy, poor, uneducated, or at the very least, disrespectful of Canadian social customs and authority (Fleras and Kunz, 2001). People of colour tend to appear as subjects of current affairs or news programming with reprehensible and stereotyped behaviours. However, there exists a long history of the celebrated exoticization of the non-white “other” as savages, primitives, and/or performers of ‘spectacle’ in both ethnographic cinema and cultural anthropology (Henley, 1998; Rony 1996). The lack of depth and diversity apparent in the images and representations of many new or long-settled Canadians, and the many cultures to which they belong, does a great disservice to social unity and inter-cultural collaboration and progress.

Some institutions of Canadian media such as public networks APTN (*Aboriginal People’s Television Network*), the CBC (*Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*), the privately-owned Citytv, and Canada’s own *National Film Board*, have raised the bar in cultural inclusiveness through specialized, original programming or through pro-active reforms within their institutions. Despite these important attempts, the negative portrayal of cultural minorities prevails in what all too often seems like a standard formula for telling the stories of people of colour. Stories that promote conflict, tragedy, and problematic lives take precedence while reflective pieces that involve complexity, systemic barriers, positive events, human creativity, or people who help one another, are left out.

It is imperative for any viewer to watch films or television with scepticism and one’s own lived experience as a tool for checking in with reality. Further to enhance our understanding of the many considerations necessary in constructing appropriate representations of an ‘other’, this

Masters Project strives to grapple with both the problems of image-making and *telling the stories of others* as learned through the writings of ethnographers and filmmakers, and through the participatory methodology of filmmaking.

In Chapter 2, the Literature Review, we examine two broadly inclusive focuses of research and practice through which audiences and producers alike should partake in imagining, or perhaps enacting, a fairer, more inclusive, and beneficial media. The first focus is an exploration of the development of ethical representation in anthropology. Following problematic origins in “salvage ethnography” (Henley, 1998), we look at how visual ethnography and ethnographic filmmaking were influenced by its imperialist, outsider interpretations of culture. The second focus is upon new innovations of research and action projects that have involved a component of video in the democratization of the research or media production processes. Using examples of community-based partnerships, we will look at various documentary video productions in which the ‘subjects’ took part in key areas of production thereby allowing for their participation in the representation of their own images and stories. The role of the ‘expert’ media maker in these projects, be they professional filmmakers or social researchers/scientists, is re-negotiated in these experiments and their experiences tell of the challenges and the rewards of shared decision-making and co-production with their subjects.

My own project with the *Multicultural Youth Circle Action* (MYCA) encompasses the remaining chapters. The MYCA members are peer support facilitators for newcomer youth groups in the Greater Vancouver area. They were trained by the *Immigrant Services Society of B.C.* through a program called the *Multicultural Youth Circle* (see Appendix A). When I first met the group in December of 2003, MYCA members told me about their facilitation work as well as of their desire to create more awareness of, and compassion for, newcomer youth amongst the general public. Pro-actively, the facilitators had been sharing their stories through local and national speaking engagements at conferences, with youth and refugee-serving agencies, on community radio, and through two documentaries made about them. Due to the facilitators’ increasing public profile, various local news media asked for personal interviews and produced

news stories focussing on the lives of immigrant and refugee youth<sup>1</sup>. The MYCA youth revealed to me that they felt very disrespected by the resultant news pieces. They felt misrepresented by the media as “they had gotten the story wrong” and that “the power of their voice was limited by sound-bites” reflecting conflict, tragedy and family struggles. Thus the stage was set for the youth to pursue their desire to tell their own stories by agreeing to work with me on a collaborative video production and action research project.

The “*Redefining Canadian*” video project took place over 9 months in 2004 and its goal was to provide MYCA project participants with media literacy and video production skills to enable them to create their own media pieces and disseminate them to a wide public audience. The project also had an overall research objective in which I assumed the role of researcher-facilitator and guided the MYCA youth in the experimental use of video as an ethnographic tool. I would not tell them what to research, or what was worthy of being communicated. I would, however, attempt to frame their work within the prolific, local genre of youth-made short films as a post-modern ethnographic methodology – a dynamic filmmaking practice which involves and yet breaks from ethnographic elements through the incorporation of the youths’ individual styles and appreciation of popular culture.

The theoretical and methodological structure of the *Redefining Canadian* project has been influenced by developments in ethnographic representation, the principles of participatory action research, and the autonomous and global movement for democratic media. My video students provided the need, the cause, and their stories. Together we created the videos and screening opportunities that made this research relevant not only to scholars, filmmakers, and the youths’ own community and peers, but to other communities of individuals who wish to learn media tools in pursuit of a fairer share of the public media sphere. The methods section in Chapter 3 describes the pre-planned curriculum process and how it eventually evolved to suit the needs and work of the people involved.

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<sup>1</sup> News pieces on the MY Circle youth appeared in The Vancouver Sun (March 15, 2003), CBC Radio One (March 21, 2003) and on BCTV/Global Television (November 23, 2003).

Chapter 4 involves the exposition and analyses of each of the five films produced; four of which are intimate and complex self-portrayals, and the fifth of which is a group 'mock-pop' documentary. Observations on the impact of the videos screenings are particularly insightful as the youth gauge community reaction and utilize the dialogue generated in a participatory feedback loop.

Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the key learnings of the project, as an example of one effort in the context of community media and media democratization. The limitations and opportunities unearthed through this project are considered here as well as the possibility of directions for future intersections in video, research and community action.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Problematic representations of youth and minorities

Media critics and scholars from both sides of the border find that minority groups (with ethnic, cultural, indigenous, religious, or linguistic backgrounds) are marginalized through under-representation and misrepresentation, “Negative depictions of minorities teach minorities in Canada that they are threatening, deviant, and irrelevant to nation-building.”(Mahtani, 2001) In the U.S., the rate of youth-involved crime and violence is decreasing, and yet, a nation-wide pattern of news coverage promotes significantly more stories of youth and crime (Youth Media Council, 2002).

In 3 1/2 months of observation of a local TV station in the San Francisco – Bay area, a media watch organization called the *Youth Media Council*, found four times as many news stories of pets than youth and poverty, and for every one story about youth and poverty, there were 11 stories about youth and crime. Youth voices, from any race, were quoted only 30% of the time while white adults were quoted 70% of the time, law enforcement officials and politicians about 50%, and youth advocates were not quoted at all. Racial bias was also found to be a determinant in the tone of news casting. Such bias should be seen as systemic and as such has a dangerous and powerful influence over public opinion, moral panics, and policy that negatively affect youth of colour. A Canadian study found that immigrant youth felt movies, television and news stories often portrayed Blacks and Hispanic people as “gangsters”, Russians as “lovers of vodka”, Muslims and North Africans as “terrorists”, and South Asians as “grovelling storekeepers” (Fleras and Kunz, 2001). The youth did not believe these stereotypes but felt that the constant use of these negative stereotypes was itself a disappointing reflection of Canadian mainstream society.

While the news media certainly needs to question and find ways to address their practices of representation, producers and promoters of other types of media must also be taken to task. For over a century, the 'moving image' in the forms of film and video has brought us information about other people, cultures, and places that we have never experienced personally. Anthropologists and filmmakers from the western industrialized countries spent the first half of the 1900s bringing home moving picture "trophies" of mostly indigenous cultures from exotic, far way places. While it may seem impertinent to regard scientists and entertainment-providers in the same light, their filmic products from those early days communicated similar conclusions to audiences. The common paradigm shared by anthropologists and filmmakers seemed to insist that distinct cultures from foreign lands were of great interest because of their odd, backward and morally different natures. And further, these people should be documented and showcased for their difference. To represent these stories of the foreign 'other', Hollywood films would often be made in studios using imported 'natives' or even local actors dressed up as natives or blacks. Cultural anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson among others, were pioneering a new science of visual ethnography. They used photographs and films to capture what they felt to be the fast-disappearing primitive cultures of the earth, "salvage ethnography", and they attempted to do so as a practice in objectivity. (Henley, 1998) To them, the camera was but a mechanical image-recording device employed as an accessory to create the traditional anthropological product of researcher narratives on the description, categorization and interpretations of cultures. Fatimah Tobing Rony (1996) likens the methodology of visual ethnographers to the practice of taxidermy, the "art of preparing, stuffing, and mounting the skins of animals, etc. in lifelike poses"<sup>2</sup>. Bias was present, however, in the worldview that these "salvage" ethnographers brought with them into the field. By refusing to acknowledge their own biases and carefully ensuring that they themselves were not within the frame of the camera the ethnographers, in effect, deceived audiences by ignoring the problems inherent in the constructed nature of a film. The camera operator decides which activities are the most important to film.

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<sup>2</sup> Canadian Oxford Paperback Dictionary. P.1077



The timing, angle, and framing of the shots can lead the audience to certain understandings of the situation. In camerawork, editing and narration, the makers of the films have discretionary control over subject description and thereby have a large hand in influencing audience interpretation.

Rony invokes the definitions of Claude Levi-Strauss to describe the anthropological mission as a means to polarize the world's population into two camps, the "historifiable" and the "ethnographiable". Similar to the adage, "he who writes history, wins the war", the anthropologists are "historifiable" because they come from a tradition of authoring their own written records, making their own war films, and exercising control of their own historical artefacts. On the other side of the lens, those who are the subject of the gaze have scientific expert-outsiders defining who they are and what their cultural practices mean. These are the natives, Africans, Asians, and others who are "ethnographiable", and who have their sacred possessions and everyday tools stolen or traded for displays in museums, colonial exhibits and world fairs (Williams, 1991)<sup>3</sup>.

Ethnographers Merian C. Cooper and Earnest B. Shoedsack (ethnographic films: *Grass*, 1925 and *Chang*, 1927) jumped the confines of the anthropological discipline and in 1933 made the monster ethnographic spectacle and Hollywood box-office hit, *King Kong* (Rony, 1996). An ironically charged film about the making of an ethnographic film, *King Kong* represents the monster that the 'native' will become if he does not know or stay in his place. He is a threat to civilization and a deviant who must be overcome. In her book, the *Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and the Ethnographic Spectacle*, Rony elaborates on the racist overtones of popular films such as *King Kong*, *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), and *Return of the Jedi* (1983) and their reinforcement of stereotyped racial characteristics and behaviours. The meta-narrative at work is that the *white man knows best and he will save the day*. In this paradigm,

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<sup>3</sup> Such as the Paris Exposition in 1900, and numerous smaller colonial exhibits leading up to the Paris Exposition.

there leaves very little room for positive stories about or diverse portrayals of individuals painted as “other” with the stroke of ignorance.

Fortunately, in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, several anthropologists began to work collaboratively with their subjects and encourage the self-critical reflection of their role as ethnographers. Jean Rouch made hundreds of ethnographic films from 1946 until his death in 2004. He introduced the use of documentary film techniques to ethnographic documentation, filmed improvised scenes, and created “ethnographic fictions” with the active participation of his subjects as collaborators (Henley, 1998, p.46). Rouch transforms the ethnographic document from a rigidly incontestable, ‘snapshot of the past’, researcher’s narrative into a filmic language that involves people-subjects in a deepened contemplation of meanings within their everyday lives, as they negotiate their position between tradition and modernity. Rouch and others that followed him in the collaborative approach allowed the camera to act not as a recorder, but as a “catalyst” of events. This process was thought to be a more significant reflection of cultural responses as subjects interacted with the medium or actions catalysed by it. Other well known attempts at collaborative filmmaking with ethnographic objectives are Sol Worth and John Adair’s work in 1966 with Navajo Indians to whom they provided 16mm cameras (Frota, 1966), and Timothy and Patsy Asch’s work from the 1960s through to the 1990s in which they practiced ethnographic filmmaking with a commitment to involving their indigenous subjects in the development of the films (Henley, 1998). Zora Neale Hurston (1901? -1960), a student of Franz Boas and a filmmaker, folklorist, novelist, and anthropologist, was a black researcher who lived among and studied her own people in order to keep their cultural heritage alive (Hurston, 1978<sup>4</sup>; Rony, 1996). Hurston was possibly the first anthropologist to experiment with collaboration and self-reflexivity in ethnographic filmmaking, as she was often a subject-participant in her films.

Debates within the anthropological canon have questioned whether ethnographers can be ‘objective’ observers of a cultural subject; and whether the researcher’s scientific documents, be

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<sup>4</sup> From the foreword by Sherley Anne Williams, to 1978 re-publication of the original novel by Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

they written, photographed or filmed, can relay truths about its subject, free from the bias. Concerns about the exploitation of subjects, the increasing access of video equipment due to technological developments, and more frequent meaningful participation from the subjects themselves to create more accurate depictions and complex, pluralistic realities has made the academic pursuit of representation a much more open and innovative, knowledge-seeking activity. These considerations and circumstances exist also in the parallel universe of the film and television industries. And if producers and distributors in these realms can learn to recognize more than the bottom-line of profits, perhaps they too will understand and welcome the changes that a more inclusive and democratic media can offer.

## **2.2 Participatory creation, responsible media**

The participation of research subjects in the decision-making, planning, production and editing of a film greatly increases the film's authenticity and its value as a vehicle for democratic organization and expression. With increasing numbers of indigenous peoples and people of colour entering the academe and the independent film sector, substantial gains have been made as they access the knowledge, skills and equipment necessary to tell their stories through their own perspectives. The following examples of video/film projects and video-involved research contribute valuable ideas and strategies for improving representation and enabling social change.

A team of western and indigenous environmental scientists undertook a climate change research partnership with the Inuvialuit of Sach's Harbour on Banks Island<sup>5</sup>, and produced important results for creating public awareness about the impacts of climate change in the sensitive Arctic region (Jolly, et al. 2002). The project was established with the Inuvialuit planning and framing their participation in the project while the outside researchers provided additional support and facilitation. The production of a video, newsletters, and research publications served as a way to involve different members of the community and also successfully communicated indigenous knowledge of changes in weather, land, oceans, and

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<sup>5</sup> The Inuvialuit are Western Arctic Inuit people who live on Bank's Island in the Beaufort Sea.

wildlife to a wider public. This participatory and collaborative project netted further resources, new international partnerships, and prepared the ground for equalizing power relations in research relationships between researchers and indigenous experts.

American filmmaker George Stoney was an executive producer for the *Challenge for Change program* in the 1960s, a 12-year experiment using portable video for catalysing community change that is now the National Film Board's most-enduring legacy. Stoney continued his activist tendency with his 1988 film, *The Uprising of '34*, a collaboration with sociologist Vera Rony to tell the lost story about the devastating defeat of 400,000 textile workers on strike in the American South (Abrash and Whiteman, 1999). With great reluctance to relive the painful memory of deaths, loss of livelihood, and the crushing of the union movement from over 50 years before, the strikers and their communities came forward to share their stories of a multi-generational tragedy. Stoney's process for making the film was sensitive to the community's pain and held 4 screenings for the subject-participants of film, in a setting with a supportive and diverse audience. The community feedback and public dialogue that ensued from both the community screenings in 4 states and the national public broadcasts resulted in long-deserved healing for the victims, as well as a revived impetus for social organizing and education among labour groups.

The 1994 student-produced documentary film, *Unequal Education: Failing Our Children*, offers the perspective of children who go to two very differently resourced public schools, in New York City. The youth filmmakers were guided by Steven Goodman, a teacher-researcher in media education who asserts, "Putting the power to create media in the hands of youth shifts the relations further from consuming culture to producing and reflecting on it. (Goodman, 1994). *Unequal Education* was produced in just under a year with the students as ethnographers doing field observation and filming in the schools, writing observations and discussing them in a group process, and editing a video to communicate their findings through the activities of a student from each of the two schools. The documentary was aired on Bill Moyer's *Listening to America* program and sent shock waves through the neighbourhoods of New York

and beyond. Yet despite the importance of project's goal to allow students to speak out about the quality of their educational experiences, the documentary was not received well by school authorities that refused to address the demand for change and instead treated the film as if it were slander. The youth filmmakers were disappointed with the outcome, and yet, were able to recognize the value of the debate they had stirred amongst the general population. Furthermore, the documentary altered the course of their own life paths as they learned to take ownership of their own education and were exposed to more opportunities in career paths.

The three aforementioned video projects all meet the criteria for participatory action research, a progressive combination of research and activism that is gaining popularity among community organizers and social researchers. Participatory action research (PAR) is based upon three elements: 1] a social action focus; 2] a transformative objective; and 3] a participatory process (Richer, 1998). Each of these elements have evolved in an attempt to combat the shortcomings of traditional research in its neglect of concrete social issues, in alienating and disempowering research subjects, and in failing to produce real social change. Video, and arts-based methods in general, have not been utilized to their potential, or written about sufficiently in PAR studies. In the following pages, I expand upon the process and results of my Masters project, the participatory and collaborative *Redefining Canadian* video project.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODS

### 3.1 Youth as researchers and video makers

The methodological preparations for an action research project using video as an ethnographic tool occurred throughout my coursework in the year of 2003. I made enquiries within the youth communities I had worked in for the last 3 years in search of an appropriate project partner. Desiring to meet a fundamental principle of participatory action research, I was seeking a partner group that was a pre-formed community with an articulated problem or issue. Further, the group would need to be sufficiently interested in learning to produce video and to collaborate with myself to use the videos in an attempt to create change for their community. A considerable commitment of time and effort was required of project participants and they were to expect to encounter a number of personal, group and technical challenges.

In late fall of 2003, I began explorations regarding a potential project with the Immigrant Services Society sponsored youth group, the Multicultural Youth Circle Action (MYCA). They fit the criteria neatly, as they were a pre-formed group with a desire to do a fun and creative project that involved action. And they had a very real problem. As immigrant and refugee youth, many of the group had had opportunities to appear on television and radio news programs, a local newspaper, and even a documentary video. Several of the youth expressed to me their fascination and excitement as they agreed to interviews with the media. In one of three introductory sessions that I had with MYCA to talk about and gauge their interest in a video project, we viewed their media pieces and discussed their reactions. These are some quotes from their reaction to a November 2003 Global Television Youth Forum on racism, immigrants and refugees:

*“It wasn’t even a forum”*

*“During the commercial breaks, that’s when we really got to talk to each other”*

*“Sophie (Lui), the interviewer, had the questions she wanted to ask and it didn’t matter what we wanted to talk about”*

*“There wasn’t enough time – each person got 2 minutes to answer the question”*

*“They wanted to film me walking in front of my school, I didn’t want to – I was so embarrassed doing it in front of everybody.”*

*“We wanted to talk about how increased racism post 9-11 affects everybody negatively, and she really focused on the Muslim youth – some of them were quite uncomfortable.”*

*“I wanted to talk about the positive work that we are doing...the peer support groups... but I didn’t have the chance.”*

*“It was really, really hard for me to be there.”*

I got to know these youth and their ideas, interests, and goals over a couple of months through attending their meetings and learning about their role as facilitators in support groups for other newcomer youth. The Immigrant Services Society agreed to be a sponsoring partner of the project when enough MYCA youth applied to and committed to the project. I explained to them that in my role as the lead video mentor I would design the video curriculum and coordinate myself and other mentors to teach it based on knowledge I had gained about their needs and interests. In addition, I had another role to play as their research facilitator. All video productions require research and this project would teach all aspects of documentary video making including topic selection, background research, collection of evidence, analysis, and the presentation of an issue. The youth agreed to a two-phase production schedule which would begin with a crash course in short video production, learning about different genres and aesthetics that could be integrated with non-fiction video making, and then a longer, group documentary process in which the youth participants would take on more of the decision-making and eventual distribution of the videos. Throughout both production phases and, in keeping with their peer support practice, the youth were encouraged and supported to look to their own knowledge, lived experience, values, culture, spirituality and creativity as sources of information and inspiration. As a result, the youth participants became researchers of their own stories and communicative ambassadors to the immigrant and refugee youth experience.

### 3.2 The researcher as facilitator

Throughout the project duration of 9 months, I continued to observe and reflect upon my main roles as research facilitator, video mentor and project coordinator, and my additional roles as fundraiser, video producer, friend, parent liaison, counsellor, driver, technical support, event organizer, video distributor, etc. I was involved with the project participants in capacities much expanded from the traditional researcher and subject relationship, a decidedly conscious decision that placed me opposite the positivist position of achieving objectivity through ‘distanced observation’. As a collaborator with the youth, I was able to become a ‘participant observer’, one allowed into the inner circle and trusted as a member of the group. As a friend and a teacher, I was compassionate to the youths’ lives outside of the project as life and project boundaries inevitably faded into one another. The youth trusted me, and the process enough, to share their most personal stories. They applied their combined energies into making the project useful and important for themselves.

As a research facilitator, I strived to ensure that the participants would be able to focus on their primary role as researchers and video makers. As with Monica Frota’s team of anthropologists and independent filmmakers and their collaborative video project with the Kayapo Indians of Brazil (Frota, 1996), I also did not try to adapt my participants’ use of the camera to my own pre-conceived research questions or problems. Frota’s team offered technical skills training and equipment and adapted it to the Kayapo’s ‘cultural and political needs’. Similarly, my role with the MYCA youth was to adapt the video production process to an exploration of their ideas – those ideas that had not had the opportunity to surface when they were subjects of mainstream news stories. The following conversation recorded in my field notes is an example of my research facilitation style. Within it, we discuss how to approach the subject matter of their first short videos:

**Francisco:** *Ummm...so....is there a theme here?*

**Alisa:** *Yeah, what is the theme?*



**Jerry, Kat & Hamid:** *What does it have to be about? What should I make my movie about?*

**Joah:** *What do you want the theme to be about?*

**Francisco, Alisa, Jerry, Kat, & Hamid:** *MY CIRCLE! Immigrants and refugees. Racism. I dunno.*

**Joah:** *There doesn't even have to be any one theme. Each of you will have the resources, help and training to make a 2-minute film that is personal to your own experience. It is an exercise for you to try and represent something of yourself that will help you to represent others better. You don't have to represent your whole life or anything, just work on a small piece that's meaningful to you.*

**Francisco:** *I think that if there was a theme it would be about belonging.*

February 28, 2004

The above conversation demonstrates the participants' expectations of having a topic assigned, and my own resistance to do so. I was aware that having some guidelines for them is helpful, otherwise the task can become unfocussed. Individual youth had asked me what the topic of their video had to be on several occasions, and always seemed surprised that there was no assigned topic. They had to go away and think about it, and in the above group discussion they asked me one final time before Francisco came up with the theme of "belonging". The four individual videos created over the next five weeks do correspond with the "belonging" theme, as much as they do with the title that Kat came up with as a name for the entire project, *Redefining Canadian*.

As a research facilitator, I attempted to build a safe group environment, provide a rigorous learning structure, and maintain a sustained momentum (activities and events in the project timeline) that are responsive to individual and collective youth needs. Yet, after years of working in the youth-driven community, I still find it difficult to strike a balance between providing too much leadership and too little. If the goal is to encourage youth expression, independent thinking, and ownership to the project, I believe the teacher/mentor/facilitator must be self-reflective about his/her power and work pro-actively to increase decision-making

confidence and ability in the youth, while gradually decreasing one's own role. For example, I developed the media literacy and video production curriculum based on consultations with the youth, mentors and the project partners. With my own knowledge of digital filmmaking and youth-friendly process, I made decisions regarding educational content and style of delivery. The youth were expected to utilize knowledge regarding their own experiences and given full creative control over the design and content of their own films. One thing we were extremely lucky to be in agreement over was the "action" focus. From the very beginning the youth were excited and eager to screen, facilitate, and promote their films. This motivation is due to their own determination to 'take action to create change' and is reflected in their name, *Multicultural Youth Circle Action*.

On the different sets of each film, we all rotated through different roles in which we played at leadership and collaboration. In time, and especially during the second, or documentary production cycle of the project, I took more of a back seat and made space for the youth to rely on themselves, their community of mentors, and each other more.

### **3.3 Curriculum and video production**

Within the project, I attempted to give the MYCA youth an arts-based, expressive and technological skills-building opportunity to find their voices through video - to practice the articulation of their ideas and self-representation. This process goes against both traditional cultural anthropology approaches and ethnographic documentary filmmaking where the researcher/filmmaker is regarded as the expert seeker of knowledge and the (passive) subject is to be observed and interpreted. To borrow from Levi-Strauss' paradigm, we attempted to move immigrant and refugee youth from the position of the "ethnographiable" subjects of the mainstream media to the position of being "historifying" agents of change in society.

Conceived of in two parts, I based the design of the video curriculum on needs identified by the youth and their family, school schedules, jobs, refugee hearings, the availability of equipment and facilities at Video In Studios, and my own knowledge and experience of

successful youth video programs. As demonstrated in Table 1, the first cycle introduced the youth participants to short filmmaking from basic familiarization of the camera to more advanced techniques and understanding the art, technical, and communicative components of creating video. Media literacy, audio, video, lighting, camera shooting conventions, experimental techniques, and computer editing were all taught and the youth participants applied their learning immediately to the creation of four individual short videos. From the outset, I introduced the idea of presenting the videos at Vancouver City Hall Council Chambers for the International Day Against Racism, and as the youth readily agreed, we added it to the schedule.

**Table 1. Cycle One – Filmmaking is Personal**

Saturday, Feb. 14	<b>Video Love Scavenger Hunt (basic camera and composition skills) and the youth film genre (viewing + discussion)</b>
Saturday, February 21	<b>Beginnings, middles and ends (in-camera edit) and conventional and experimental video techniques (viewing+discussion)</b>
Saturday, February 28 (week of)	<b>Camera/Lights/Sound &amp; Scriptwriting workshops, Production/Shoot for all films</b>
Saturday, March 6 (week of)	<b>Individual Editing workshops/Rotate use of Editing Suite</b>
Saturday, March 13 (week of)	<b>Edit/ Rotate use of Editing Suite + produce master tape</b>
Friday, March 19	<b>Public Screening at Vancouver City Hall for the International Day Against Racism</b>

The youth filmmakers and their videos were received with great enthusiasm to a packed audience at City Hall. Their first public appearance triggered numerous invitations to present their videos to community groups, the Vancouver School Board of Trustees, conferences, festivals, and youth groups. These subsequent appearances took place in the break between the first and second cycles, and became embedded into the second cycle as an opportunity to use the first films as a catalyst for discussion around stereotypes and racism, as well as a venue for screening different edits of their group documentary in-progress (See Section 3.6, Table 4). In this way, audiences became participants in the development of the documentary, and the youth filmmakers became “researcher-facilitators” on the topics of media representation and the active

role youth can take to undermine misrepresentation. Table 2 illustrates the curriculum and process for the group documentary. In addition to the listed activities, there were numerous informal meetings where problems, issues, and logistics were resolved through collective decision-making. Many of these are recorded in a logbook where I kept notes throughout the project.

**Table 2. Cycle Two – Creative Documentary**

Saturday, May 1	<b>Preparatory Group Meeting</b>
Saturday, May 8	<b>Advanced Sound Workshop</b>
Saturday, May 15	<b>Video literacy, Advanced Camera/Lights/Sound, Script ideas with Rina Fraticelli (National Film Board)</b>
Saturday, May 22 + week	<b>Documentary Script Development + Pitching the Story</b>
Saturday, May 29 + week	<b>Interview techniques + Script Development</b>
Saturday, June 5	<b>On-location shooting: Interviews</b>
Saturday, June 12	<b>Studio Shoot</b>
Saturday, June 19 – September 25	<b>Transcribing, Paper Edit, Computer Editing, Screening-Dialogues</b>
Sunday, September 26	<b>Premiere Private Screening – My Circle Community</b>
Saturday, October 2	<b>Public Launch – Media Democracy Day</b>

The timeline for Cycle 2 was adjusted to meet the needs of the youth participants, who wanted to work on the documentary throughout the summer. Some participants had other commitments for short durations, and one participant moved to another province with his family. The remaining youth took turns at the editing and got together to present their most recent ‘cuts’ to audiences wherever they were invited. As I had planned to begin ‘taking a back seat’ during this cycle, I agreed to allow the delay. Indeed the delay allowed them time and space to sort through their topic and work toward the successful completion of the project. By the summer, the youth were familiar with Video In Studios and were editing their documentary as producers/members of the artist-run centre. I was no longer needed to provide logistical support and so I reduced my daily drop-ins to weekly check-ins and supporting the youth at various screening-dialogues in and around the community. Going at their own speed, the youth

filmmakers let me know that they were preparing to be finished their film at the end of September. I increased my efforts again to help them plan for and pull off both a private community screening (for their friends, family, the film’s subjects, our partnering organizations, and mentors) and a public launch at the two-day annual celebration of Media Democracy at the central library in downtown Vancouver.

### 3.4 Supporting mentors

A major accomplishment of the video project was for the youth participants to receive mentorship from practicing film/television professionals and video artists, and to foster their relationships with these mentors throughout every stage of the filmmaking process. Minelle Mahtani’s comprehensive review of studies on the relationship between media and minorities (2001), finds a growing awareness of institutional *whiteness* since the 1980s. The lack of cultural diversity in newsrooms, and/or the powerlessness felt by Canadian journalists of colour to influence decision-making in news stories is a significant factor concerning the perpetuation of dominant culture stereotypes and prejudices. Two of the project mentors, who work in both film and television, link the lack of diversity in media institutions to a common industry practice of hiring people already known to them (personal communication: Sandy MacDonald and Pascal Pillot-Bruhat). This project was an opportunity to make a group of immigrant and refugee filmmakers-in-training ‘known’ to as many media professionals as possible. Table 3 lists the mentors who assisted with the project and gives an indication of the networks that the youth became exposed to.

**Table 3. Media Professionals and Artists Mentors in Redefining Canadian**

<b>Mentors</b>	<b>Specialization</b>
Desiree Leal	Filmmaker & post-production coordinator of CBC’s “ <i>The Collector</i> ”
Veeno Dewan	Television producer/director of “ <i>ViVa!</i> ” shown on M Channel and Citytv
Cindy Mochizuki	Video and animation artist, curator/programmer
Hiromi Goto	Writer (1995 Commonwealth Writers Award, Tiptree Award)
Rafael Tsuchida	Video artist & operations coordinator at Video In Studios
Bhak Jolicoeur	Multi-media artist/entrepreneur and technical intern at Video In Studios

<b>Mentors</b>	<b>Specialization</b>
Kai Ling Xue	Filmmaker/video & performance artist
Emma Hendrix	Sound artist
Sandy MacDonald	Second grip & filmmaker
Pascal Pillot-Bruhat	Key lighting technician
Donna Lee	Video artist and educator, DOXA film festival
Sepideh Saii	Video artist/actor
Chris Fraser	Media literacy instructor
Amey Kazymmerchyk	Filmmaker/visual artist
Bo Myers	Scriptwriting mentor/video artist
Jorah Fraser	Filmmaker/instructor
Rachel Thompson	Web/graphic designer/proprietor of Bluemuse Media
Samonte Cruz	Musician/technical intern at Video In Studios
Mark Carvery	Technical intern at Video In Studios
Rina Fraticelli	Executive producer, Pacific Region – National Film Board of Canada

In the Conclusions, I describe some of the paid work and other opportunities that the young filmmakers received as a direct result of their participation in this project and the people they met through it.

### **3.5 Participatory video making as research**

In working with young people who are newcomers to Canada, the choice of digital video as the medium for data collection, analysis, and dissemination is more appropriate than text-based research. Due to the global popularity of television and movies, I found that the youth had a pre-disposed fascination with and attraction to filmmaking. Meanwhile the standard written text of academic English would likely have posed barriers to some of these second-language English learners. Video was akin to a universal language, regardless of what their mother tongues were. As well, the youths' desire for learning this technology was attributed to video's place in popular culture, and the perceived opportunities for employment in the entertainment sector. Additionally, the youth noted video's value as a form of artistic expression. In any case, the idea of using video to explore ideas or questions of their own making was obviously a welcome change from the one-off consultations, focus groups, interviews, and surveys that the youth had been recruited to participate in on past projects. Video also removed language barriers for some, while increasing the opportunities to speak, write and practice English for others.

Beyond the initial glamour of making films, the youth found filmmaking to be intensive work requiring an enormous time and energy commitment. Most of the youth were in school and/or had a job and they worked on their film projects on weekends and weeknights. They had to give up leisure activities and their spare time in order to plumb the depths of their lived experience and capture and communicate it on video. Furthermore, within the participatory action research framework, participants collaborated in decision-making about group process, subject matter, working roles, paths of analysis and communication within their films, and then they had to stick to their decisions and follow through on completing the videos and facilitating the participation of audiences during screenings. In doing so, filmmaking became a rigorous, knowledge-seeking research method where knowledge resides among many individuals both within the group of filmmakers and their audiences. The digital films created are a composite of many 'truths', a complex and layered product of the experience of seeking stories about people who migrate and their interaction with a new, and also composite, society.

### **3.6 Video as social catalyst**

*“We want to engage in a dialogue with the media, challenge the stereotypes and offer alternative perspectives on issues pertaining to immigrant and refugee youth. We also hope to bring awareness and open up discussion on these issues in the mainstream. This project is our way of saying: We exist and we are more than just drug dealers and high school dropouts.”*

Multicultural Youth Circle Action (MYCA)  
March 19, 2004 (at Vancouver city hall)

Five films in total were created by the MYCA youth through the Redefining Canadian project (see Appendix C for video stills from the films and <http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/grad/joahl> for the videos on-line). The first four films created were each directed, written and edited by a single participant with help from the other youth, mentors and friends as supporting cast and crew. These short films were, in essence, intimate self-portrayals though

radically different in form, content and style. They were packaged as a series and named after the project, *Redefining Canadian*. *Mediatosis*, the follow-up group documentary had elements of satiric humour, ‘mockumentary’, and in its vixen-laden sword fight scene – an indulgence in ‘pop culture’ action. While the *Redefining Canadian* series chose to show audiences and the media what individual youth might do with their own stories given the chance, *Mediatosis* was a more direct critique of the media and its problematic representations of youth. Both *Redefining Canadian* and *Mediatosis* were screened to audiences to encourage dialogue about media representations and Canadian attitudes towards immigrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, queers, youth, and others marginalized by the media.

These screening-dialogues gave many different audiences a space to question the assumptions relayed to them across the screen. It was an opportunity to talk back, to think about the possibilities if they were able to influence the media stories that made it to air. Of course, not all audience members agreed with or understood the MYCA youths’ videos. Some of their most difficult audiences were other youth, both newcomer and settled Canadians, who challenged them to communicate more effectively to their own age group. These hard-to-please audiences motivated the MYCA youth to become better facilitators and give age and culturally appropriate context to the presentation of their films. The *Redefining Canadian* series has a very different style and lightness compared to *Mediatosis*. That is a direct result of using the former films and various rough cuts of *Mediatosis* in screening-dialogues and allowing the audiences to participate in the development of the latter. This willingness to take and incorporate criticism into their work resulted in the audiences’ active engagement in filmmaking. The MYCA youth gave their audiences the opportunity that the mainstream media never gave them and the end result is an important step in the direction of democratic media making.

The MYCA youth never turned down an opportunity to present their films and were extremely pro-active in finding new audiences to screen to. They have, to date, presented their films and facilitated dialogues around issues raised by the films on at least 25 occasions. In addition, the films were broadcasted on *Independent Community Television* (Channel 4) on more



than 12 occasions, and they've been used to train 4 new groups of *MY Circle* facilitators at the time of this writing. Table 4 illustrates the variety of audiences that participated in the *Redefining Canadian* project.

**Table 4. Screenings/Facilitated Dialogues with Different Audiences in 2004/2005**

Vancouver Council Chambers (for the commemoration of the International Day Against Racism and Discrimination)	March 19/04
My Circle Advisory Committee	March 24/04
(hosted by the Action Research eXchange)	March 26/04
My Circle friends and family gathering (Video In Studios)	April 5/04
Vancouver School Board Trustees	April 26/04
Latin American Youth Group	May 1/04
Anti-Capitalist Convergence Conference	May 1/04
Vancouver YouthWeek at Britannia Community School	May 3/04
Vancouver Youth Week at the Roundhouse Community Centre Youth Arts Exhibit	May 3 -7/04
Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (Summer Open House)	May 13/04
ExplorAsian Asian Heritage Month program at Video In Studios	May 28/04
Screening for representatives of the Korean Broadcasting Commission in Vancouver at ICTV	June /04
SUCCESS (with Chinatown youth leadership group)	June /04
SUCCESS (with Coquitlam youth leadership group)	June/04
McCreary Youth Centre Society	June 19/04
West Vancouver School District Diversity Camp	Sept 24/04
Cue Up – monthly producers night at Video In Studios	June 24/04
Immigrant Services Society Bi-Monthly Staff Meeting	Sept. 2/04
Labour Day event with No One Is Illegal (Video In Studios)	Sept. 6/04
Talent Show with My Circle Friends and Families	Sept. 26/04
Media Democracy Day at Vancouver Public Library Downtown Panel and Premiere Screening	Oct. 2/04
New Westminster Secondary (United Earth youth group)	Oct. 13/04
Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health Symposium	Oct. 23/04
Vancouver Eastside Cultural Centre (“Ignite” Youth Cabaret)	May 7/05
Brock University (Multicultural Days International Conference)	June 23/05

The MYCA youth embarked on this journey to create videos in order to regain their sense of self after feeling powerless from their interactions with the mainstream media. However, they took further steps to create spaces of dialogue for hundreds of others to consider the impacts of the media on minorities and on Canadian society in general. The *Redefining Canadian* project put youth at the forefront of a creative struggle to help people resist the daily bombardment of stereotypes and discrimination by shallow, conflict-ridden media stories. The youth filmmakers

were able to re-define themselves as knowledgeable and as media-makers with important perspectives to share. They were also able to use their media works as catalysts for social change in encouraging audiences to talk back to, and find their own ways of creating, media.

## CHAPTER 4 VIDEO ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

*The Redefining Canadian Project is our “letter to the editor”. It is our response to the inaccurate media portrayal and our way to express our own perspectives and ideas, not only as immigrant and refugee youth, but also as people beyond our migratory status. In a period of five weeks, and with the help of lead mentor/filmmaker, Joah Lui, the MY Circle Action Team, Immigrant Services Society of B.C. and Video In Studios, we learned the process of filmmaking and created the four short films that make up Redefining Canadian. The films reflect our individual dreams and realities told from our own perspectives. By becoming filmmakers, we took responsibility of our own portrayal.*

Multicultural Youth Circle Action (MYCA)  
March 19, 2004 (at Vancouver city hall)

The *Redefining Canadian* and *Mediatosis* films (available on-line at <http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/grad/joahl>) refuse to be simple communications of what it means to be an immigrant or refugee youth. Many audience members, both young and old, upon first viewing the films could not understand them. These films are difficult texts that complicate our understanding of immigrants and refugees as we are used to seeing them portrayed without dimension via the mainstream media. The *Redefining Canadian* project also refutes the idea that there can be a ‘complete’ ethnography constructed about a group of immigrants or refugees. The epigram of this chapter is taken from the MYCA youths’ “Letter to the Editor” which accompanies their videos and which was first presented at City Hall (see Appendix B for complete version). Were we to provide this filmmaking opportunity to each future graduate of the ISS MY Circle peer support program, I believe we would have an inexhaustible source of stories and narratives to redefine what becoming Canadian is all about.

The *Redefining Canadian* project gives voice to the evolving culture of being an immigrant and/or refugee youth in Canada. Part of that immigrant/refugee experience involves struggling with having what Fatimah Tobing Rony called the “third eye”, being able to see

oneself through the eyes of another (1996). In the films, *Do you speak Canadian* and *Three Worlds*, Kat and Alisa each come to terms with the alternating roles strangers, family and friends unconsciously insist upon them. Often, a newcomer's experience is stressful - which role or consciousness will survive? Newcomers want to belong and fear isolation from friends, family and society. Jerry (*The Best Is Yet to Come*) and Francisco (*Winter Son*) contend with different scenarios of acceptance/rejection, and push through stereotypes of victim to become the winning protagonists of their own narratives. In *Mediatosis*, all the youth work together to create a documentary in what can be understood as a "post-modern style" – throwing away the linear and too-serious afflictions of the traditional documentary to include mockumentary techniques, docu-drama, and a fight scene that references the popular box office hit, *Kill Bill*. *Mediatosis* tackles the subject of stereotypes head-on, self-reflectively positioning the youth filmmakers as active social agents. Each of the films is described below with the stories that accompanied their creation and dissemination into public view.

#### **4.1 Kat's film: "Do You Speak Canadian?"**

Katrina Ao (2004)  
5:05

*A young Filipina enters a building downtown and becomes trapped in an elevator of stereotypes and cultural no-woman's land. When she speaks with a noticeable Filipino accent she is assumed to be a janitor by one man and told that Tagalog is not a useful language by a second. When she speaks without a Filipino accent, the first man becomes attracted to her and makes a proposition while the second man, himself owning a strange accent, is somewhat resentful when he finds out she has a favourable job.*

This film was inspired by a discussion with friends where one person suggested that Canadians *love* accents. This got Kat thinking about whether or not this was true and she decided that it wasn't. In the elevator, Kat plays with the advantages of having a Canadian accent and the disadvantages of having a Filipino accent, inviting the viewer to consider his/her own biases and related behaviours. Throughout the project, the MYCA youth have often referred to the pervasiveness of "polite racism" in Canadian Society, that was but one of the topics that didn't

get on the agenda during their Global Television debacle. *Do you speak Canadian* offers an exquisite sampling of the types of racist things that can happen to you in polite Canadian society. The comedic manner in which these unfortunate circumstances are presented, plant the protagonist (Kat) squarely in a position of power to judge and discard the ignorant men who objectify her. At the end of the film, Kat finally alights off the elevator and turns down the hallway to her office. She throws up her hands in a gesture that seems to say “oh well, what can you do?” and carries on with her day. This attests to the necessity of ‘getting on with it’ and for many immigrants, this is a way of cultural survival where incidents like the ones on Kat’s elevator are common, everyday experiences. By making a funny film about these examples of polite racism, Kat did do something about it. A screening-dialogue with students at the Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group elicited some insightful comments and questions:

*“I can’t even think in my first language anymore. If we ‘redefine Canadian’, where do we go from here?”*

*“I shunned my immigrant past, and now I don’t even speak my parent’s language”*

*“Think of all the stories out there – who are all those students? I thought all international students were well off.”*

Kat’s video triggered some deep, personal probing on the part of the university students – and they were able to become vulnerable and share their thoughts which helped them to reflect upon and beyond their own assumptions. Often, when the subject of racism comes up, people will deny it exists, become very defensive or talk about it in a distanced and theoretical way. This film holds power and encourages it to shift in that it is a very personal and vulnerable offering that helps the viewer to relate to, or sympathize with, the protagonist. Moreover, the use of humour and absence of a guilt-inducing victim in this film made the subject of common, everyday racism a more comfortable subject to explore openly in discussion. The real gains are made not in the film but in the facilitated discussions afterward where audience members recall their own brushes with racism and imagine pro-active, anti-racist scenarios for future circumstances.

## 4.2 Jerry's film: "The Best is Yet to Come"

Jerry Leung (2004)  
2:20

*A Chinese boy finds himself in a forest of shadows and light. The soundtrack is disruptive and noisy, a woman's voice breathes "He's lost...he's he's lost...he's...just lost". The boy walks forwards and backwards on the same paths. Jump cuts and layered images create a sense of disorientation, confusion. He finally sits down to rest, puts down his head, and falls asleep. When the boy awakens, he is in a playground full of other children and families. He sees others having fun with friends and he looks side to side - as if looking for somebody or something. He sits down alone and eventually a ball rolls towards him. Slowly, he picks it up and shyly returns it to the two girls who were playing with it. They invite him to play! He does, and plays very well. He is happy. Suddenly, the boy wakes up and he is back in the forest - someone is shaking him. A friend is there, and shows him the way out of the forest.*

*The Best is Yet to Come* is a film without dialogue, appropriately communicated by Jerry who is sometimes quiet. Its experimental aesthetic, present in both soundscape and visuals, simulates both nightmare and fantasy. The film is a dramatic rendering of Jerry's own experience of coming to Canada – the forest is a metaphor for culture shock and the playground a metaphor for Canadian society. He says that when he first came here, he thought other people didn't like him or didn't want to get to know him. Then he joined the ISS peer support program where he made a lot of friends and realized he had to take chances and learn to trust people. Talking to people was really scary for him. While the film sympathetically acknowledges the discomfort and disorientation of being a newcomer, Jerry places the onus on the newcomer to reach out. He rejects the idea of the newcomer as victim, and focuses instead on the need to be resilient and take opportunity where it appears. Cross-cultural friendships and acceptance are important keys to becoming Canadian, for it is through friends that Jerry experiences happiness and finds his way out of the forest.

This film appealed to older audience members who spoke about their own experiences being much the same as Jerry's when they first arrived in Canada. They understood the film

through the recognition of the feelings it stirred. Yet quite a few younger (teenaged) audience members seemed to have some trouble following the storyline. Some youth said that it was confusing and they didn't like that. Also, because the *Redefining Canadian* videos are so short (one and a half to five minutes long) and were usually shown back to back, there was not enough time for some people to process the different storylines. Definitely, people who got to see the films on more than one occasion told us that they got more out of the films each time. There are many people who think the *The Best Is Yet to Come* is effective, and for audiences who do not 'get the film', they may also be too entrenched in the way they expect a film to be – with words to interpret the action. Interestingly, the lack of words made this film more accessible to some of our audience members who did not speak English fluently. For Jerry, a youth of few words, this film was a perfect expression of his experience in a new country; the value he places on friendship and belonging, and the optimism he has for his future.

### 4.3 Alisa's film: "Three Worlds"

Alisa Shaykhullina (2004)

2:44

*A young girl's voice narrates and introduces the cause of her troubles. Her parents exchange tense words in Russian regarding her whereabouts. She is seen at various places alone outside her school writing in her diary. Old photos show a once-happy family, recent photos show a girl happy with her friends. There is a rupture here between old and new, friends and family. How and where can this girl be herself?*

This is a poignant and touching film by Alisa as she tries to come to terms with the worlds she feels herself torn between. In her film, she deals with the pain of her parent's separation, too soon after their recent immigration from Russia. As she struggles to divide her time between each of her parents, her friends, and her own self, she feels guilty that she doesn't have time enough for all and yet this is the reality of her *Three Worlds*. This is a powerful testament to the self-awareness and development of a fifteen year-old immigrant in two and a half minutes. The dramatic cello soundtrack is provided by Alisa's friend, Freda, who is also a graduate of the ISS peer support program. One of Alisa's main revelations, which she returns to

often when she speaks at the screening-dialogues, is that “we are not different from you because we are immigrants”. She points to the common coming-of-age struggles faced by many teenagers regardless of culture, race, or skin colour. She has also stated that “we are the same”, “we have the same values, and they are good values”. It would seem that Alisa has internalized the stereotype that ‘immigrants are different’ and the difference that immigrants are labelled with is ‘not a good kind of difference’. Losing one’s cultural difference, like losing one’s accent, is an experientially learned survival tactic for newcomers who learn not to stand out. In the race to assimilate into mainstream society, we risk the danger of losing those distinctive cultural ways that are so important and valuable for maintaining our cultures. However, in getting to know Alisa and observing her ability to befriend, in an instant, many friends of many cultures – I believe she does appreciate difference. She sees beyond difference, and into the core essence of what people are - human. There lies all the goodness, and that is what we should all look for. In *Three Worlds*, Alisa shows how complex life can be, and asks us the viewer to have the compassion to look from our place of difficulty to see and sympathize with another’s.

Parents in particular were moved by Alisa’s film and one parent shared that she gained great insight into the different worlds her own children exist within. Alisa was encouraged by her mentors to portray her parents sensitively in this film. This project was meant as a space for the youth to explore their own perspectives, while at the same time experience the struggle of representing others who may enter into their films. An earlier cut of the film fell too easily into the parents as oppressors – child as victim “generation gap” narrative. Understanding that Alisa’s parents are actually very liberal with her and there is a great love between them, *Three Worlds* was transformed to better represent a more layered situation. The final edit focuses on Alisa as the contemplative and active social agent. Indeed, there are ruptures between her worlds, but the gaps are bridgeable by the young woman who grows into her ideas, words, drawings, and film.

As a matter of ethical process, Alisa was sent home with the video on tape for her parents to view and give approval for the use of their personal photos. Alisa’s mother and father each approved in turn, and became more aware of their daughter’s activities in the video project. The



consideration of youth-parent relations is essential for a youth community project. Youth do not exist in isolation from their families and, especially with immigrant and refugee populations, many individuals are inter-dependent upon their family members so any predictable conflicts should be pro-actively handled so learning and benefits may also be realized. In this case, Alisa's mother came to one of the screening-dialogues and expressed her private thanks for the positive developments she saw in her daughter and also for being kept informed and included in Alisa's very time-consuming video activities.

#### **4.4 Francisco's film: "Winter Son"**

Francisco-Fernando Granados

1:36

*A melancholy tune is hummed while from bridge to underpass a young man stares through us. A faceless woman reads passages from a letter of rejection from the Refugee Board of Canada. Suffering and pain bears down and yet triumph over rage brings renewal. Poetry and judicial coldness collides with arresting visuals.*

Francisco's film is simultaneously raw, resistant, assertive, political, and erotic. His shot list for the film was detailed and artfully drawn out on storyboards, and the camera stayed true to the power of his gaze. Look at him. We cannot look away. He is refugee. He is Spanish speaking, he is other, he is in trouble with authority, he fights a demon within himself. Is he being rejected by a lover? Or is he being rejected by Canada? He struggles into and against the light. He doesn't die a forever death, like so many minorities on TV. He resurrects himself and lives to make more films and art.

*Winter Son* is composed of many dramatic moments that produce an intensity of emotion. Four years ago, he came with his family to Canada as refugee claimants from Guatemala and had since been fighting for the right to immigrate here. The curious subject of many interviews, Francisco attempted to use his media opportunities to advocate for a deeper understanding of the plight of refugees amongst the Canadian public. When he joined the project, Francisco's family had already struggled through four years of trying to make ends meet in Canada and had recently

received a notice of rejection from the Refugee Board. In *Winter Son*, we hear the transcripts of the refugee board decision and experience the devastating effect of that on Francisco's psyche. As he was making *Winter Son*, Francisco had called into question, "Do I really want to criticize the government which I hope will change its mind and take me in?" After the films were made, we had a special screening for friends and family members of MY Circle at which a father shared [translated from Spanish]:

*"Congratulations! The emotions you wanted to express are very strong, and we all (in the audience) experienced them. Francisco's video brings to mind the questions: after a person is accepted – does the government still control their life? Are we going to be absorbed? Aren't we supposed to come to this country to be free? ...Congratulations to you all because you are breaking the barriers of this government. You are the energy of this country – you have the power."*

When we heard those words, it was a powerful, defining moment. The father began his statement in English and then switched to Spanish and Francisco translated for the rest of the audience. I remember it was dark and only a few moody spotlights shone on the audience. When he finished to great applause, we were so happy and thankful, and not just a little bit trembling. Francisco looked brave, proud and serious. When I asked him later what he was thinking at that moment, Francisco said: "It's all about how much I want to reveal. I no longer want to tell my story unless it's through a creative, artistic medium. I'm done with being the poor refugee." As the youth filmmakers were in the process of editing their short films, Francisco was awaiting the final decision by the Refugee Appeal Board. He expressed his feelings of powerlessness and his struggle with the opposite senses of belonging to, and rejection from, the Canadian State. As he was also growing through his teenage years in Canada, he had found and lost his first love – the experience of vulnerability that followed was not unlike that which he felt in his relationship with Canada. Francisco is able to communicate these parallel losses through editing cuts in video and layered poetry and text in sound. The effect is somewhat disorienting, and can be confusing, although here the artist's intention is to challenge the audience to look and look again, to hear and

hear again. Repeated viewings of the video bring us to a deeper place of being able to truly hear his story.

Throughout the project and afterward, Francisco often reflected on the impact learning to create video had on his life. As one of the MYCA youth who felt the most exploited by the media, he had hoped for a different kind of opportunity. Through the making of *Winter Son*, at such a critical moment in his life, he was able to gain a sense of control and thus a recovery of personal power. In art, Francisco could be a human experiencing life and designing his own triumphs, and not just a “poor refugee”, victim to circumstance. And as art has sometimes been known to imitate life, Francisco’s life has made a turn for the imitation of his art. Soon after the video was completed, the appeal to the Refugee Board was successful and the Granados family allowed to stay.

#### **4.5 The group documentary: “Mediatosis”**

Kat Ao, Alisa Shaykhullina, Brett “Jackamo” Tsinigine, Francisco-Fernando Granados, Pamela Verma (2004)

10:38

*This "mock-pop-documentary" begins with a Global Television Youth Diversity Forum in which members of the MY CIRCLE ACTION are participants. Dissatisfied with their media portrayal, these youth take the video camera into their own hands. TV reporters are mocked in paparazzi-fashion, and the battle over representation is metaphorically portrayed as a Hollywood-inspired sword fight. Interspersed with these hilarious moments are real interviews with a diverse range of youth, activists, and renowned filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, who share their ideas about the media.*

After each youth had an opportunity to write, direct, shoot, perform, and edit their own short film, we began advanced training and work on a creative group documentary that resulted in *Mediatosis*. Although we lost Jerry to Grade 12 finals, we gained Pamela (another MYCA member) and Jack (a Cree and Navajo youth who had left the public school system in the Tri-Cities). Pam and Jack each had some experience with video production and the youth filmmakers decided to welcome their participation. Jack spent countless hours everyday at *Video In Studios*

working on *Mediatosis* or watching his favourites; *Stargate*, *Kill Bill* and Chinese fight movies. He was the brainchild and director of the fight scene which starred Alisa and project mentor, Desiree Leal. Pamela is known for her great organizational skills and ability to multi-task. She helped to whip the group into shape and contributed a lot of brainpower to the paper-edit, where the content and main arguments of the film were developed into a timeline. The documentary group now consisted of five core youth with an additional two MYCA youth who appear in the video.

The idea for the subject matter of *Mediatosis* first arose during screenings of the first video series. Audiences were very much drawn to the MYCA's story about their treatment by professional media makers and were immediately interested in the *Redefining Canadian* videos as a positive and creative action that the youth took to empower themselves. However, many audience members needed more explanation regarding the artful first films, and they consistently asked the MYCA filmmakers to make a video about their specific experiences with the media. *Mediatosis* was conceived as a film that could be an introduction to the *Redefining Canadian* series and while MYCA was continuing to receive requests to present their videos, they started to bring early edits of *Mediatosis* to the screenings. From conception to completion, progressive edits of *Mediatosis* were shown to at least six community audiences where the youth filmmakers facilitated discussion and received feedback.

At the first such screening to an *Exploration Festival* (Asian Heritage Month) event, a 10-minute edited version of the Global Youth Forum was screened in which the most negative and dramatic interchanges of the event were pasted together. The reaction from the *Exploration Festival* audience was dramatic. They cautioned the youth against demonizing Sophie Lui, the *Global Television* reporter who hosted the *Youth Diversity Forum*. Although the reporter was seen to be manipulative in her elicitation of tragedy and trauma in the lives of immigrant and refugee youth, the filmmakers did concede to the audience that she was most likely a token reporter of colour who was given a mandate by her producers to extract the most dramatic scenarios to keep the show interesting. As Jorge says in *Mediatosis*, "They were asking questions

of things that weren't really that relevant to me. When I was trying to talk of things that were relevant to me, there wasn't space to talk about it."

The next edit was much farther along and included most of the interviews and a lot of the humour of the final video. It was screened to the *Immigrant Services Society* staff (200 people) and they were very impressed by the film. There were many questions and suggestions, the summary of which was that the youth should continue to work on the documentary and make clearer the connection between themselves, the people interviewed in the film, and the reason for making the film. This feedback was repeated by a few different audiences, leading the youth to edit more and develop further the context, impact, and analysis of their involvement in the Global TV Youth Forum.

While it was easy to re-edit clips of the Global Youth Forum to make Global, and Sophie the reporter, look bad. It was much more difficult to try to represent Global fairly or to investigate deeper into the reasons why they did it that way. In the end, after many re-edits, the final version stands with short clips from the Global Youth Forum that focus less on images of Sophie and more of the youth themselves and their experience of the event. It is a crucial beginning to the film, and sets the course of action for the youth filmmakers to reclaim the media for the re-representation of youth.

One prolonged moment of tension I felt in my role as researcher-facilitator occurred when throughout several production meetings I conveyed my gentle criticisms that *Mediatosis* needed more direct explanation of the issues at hand and that the best way to accomplish this was to tell the story of how MYCA members had been manipulated by the media. I felt that the video fell short of effectively portraying the youths' personal experiences with the media. There are a lot of jokes on the media; manifested through the "mockumentary" footage where the film crew act as "paparazzi" and an insulting reporter gets a lot of laughs. There are also serious interviews with several youth (only one of whom are involved in MYCA) who share their experiences of the media, a youth worker who explains society's general dislike of youth, and filmmaker Alanis

Obomsawin who reveals her strategies for telling the stories of her fellow native peoples through film. The swordfight scene is a metaphorical duel between ‘youth’ and ‘the media’. Voices from the *Mediatisis* interviews overlay the fight scene reinforcing the struggle that youth and minorities face in achieving fair representation. The exaggerated close-ups and repeat action cuts are obviously meant to bring humour to the situation, a survival tactic in the never-ending fight.

*Mediatisis* does not focus explicitly on the media misrepresentation felt by the MYCA members as a result of their immigrant and refugee status. The film they have created broadens their experience of discrimination to one that is shared by many others who are perceived as different. The film tells us that youth, aboriginal people, immigrants and refugees are often misrepresented and misunderstood and that it is possible to do something about it. Creating their own media through visual art, radio, and film, the film’s subjects speak about how being able to tell their own stories, in their own ways, has been affirming and empowering.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Research, video production and social action: key learnings

The *Redefining Canadian* project was an intensive immersion in learning for everybody involved. The youth filmmakers and I each logged in between 300-500 hours on the project, many of these hours we spent together working as a team. It is difficult to pare down the lessons learnt for what is essential to communicate here in a concluding statement. I have chosen to focus on aiding those readers who are contemplating similar projects so that the knowledge I have gained through taking ideas to action may ideally be applied elsewhere. The following topics are discussed in the context of the *Redefining Canadian* project: 1] video as a bridging vehicle between research and social change; 2] leadership, engagement, and community participation; and 3] the natural tension involved in being a youth-friendly mentor and research-facilitator.

#### 1] Video as a bridging vehicle between research and social change:

As an ethnographic research tool for young people, short filmmaking with video is a very dynamic process and as such enjoys an advantage over text-based and even photo-based ethnographies. The MYCA members had taken part in many surveys, focus groups, and interviews for various studies and the level of interest in these activities was waning in the group. Video was a crucial format for making 'research' an exciting and creative activity. In our project, youth interest was maintained over an extended period of time because of a unique and demanding fusion of challenges presented by technological skill development, the rigorous standards of non-exploitative community-based inquiry, and the potential of social change that could be effected via the films. Embedded within an action-oriented project using an artful medium, a youth-friendly process was key. A youth-friendly process meant that the challenges, though difficult, were made fun through creative activities and well supported by a large pool of mentors who provided a positive, non-authoritarian, and respectful environment.

## 2] Leadership, engagement, and community participation:

Minelle Mahtani (2001) offers ample evidence that racism is institutionalized through hiring practices in the Canadian media industry, citing a 1994 survey by the *Canadian Newspaper Association* which finds that of 41 Canadian newsrooms, ethnic minorities represent only 2.6% of employees – five times less than the in the general Canadian population. Without the opportunities to represent themselves, it is no wonder that ethnic minorities suffer the kind of portrayals that they do.

In the *Redefining Canadian* project, the young filmmakers came to realize the rare privilege and the power of being in the driver's seat when it came to making executive decisions and carrying through to the end-product, the delivery of their own representational communications. Beyond producing videos, artefacts that can sometimes be viewed by very few people without a proper distribution strategy, the youth became leaders in the public distribution of the videos through the screening-dialogues. Many groups of people were provided with a space for dialogue on issues of racism, catalysed by the youth films and their facilitated events. These events were extremely important to the project because they placed young immigrants and refugees in a position of authority and leadership, affording them a great responsibility to which they became very engaged in the appropriate execution of power for learning and community benefit. As well, the screening-dialogues were critical to the research process of community inquiry where the circle of knowledge-seekers and knowledge-contributors expanded to include different audiences of youth, artists, media makers, parents, community service providers, and many others. These practices engaged many communities in the action research project, ensured a constant dissemination of findings throughout the life of the project, and created an audience for the final products as well.

## 3] The tension involved in being a youth-friendly mentor and research-facilitator:

Researchers embarking on a quest to do community-based research, and activists hoping to make an academic study out of their work are faced with many decisions requiring a fair



amount of initiative. Although there are many encouraging signs that action research or participatory action research is making the grade in universities and communities alike, there are many opportunities to make mistakes. From informed consent, to “how to speak for others” to potentially exploitative visual ethnography, ethics is an issue that looms large in any project. While there are no prescriptive formulas for doing ethical research, it is equally important to study the issues concerned with community-based research, to spend an adequate amount of time learning about the needs of the prospective community, to develop an appropriate methodology based on consultations with the community, and to work hard at establishing open, honest communications with community partners prior to beginning the project and throughout.

There is an unavoidable tension that exists within the researcher-facilitator - between acting on an intuitive sense for serving the immediate needs of the community, and ensuring that proper documentation and self-reflection accompanies the research analysis and decisions that will legitimize the project as academic work. Through writing and sharing critical reflections about one’s role, the research-facilitator can track the decisions made, the circumstances in which decisions are made in difficulty or through compromise, and the different arguments that framed the decision. These provide enlightening insights to a collaborative process, such as in the *Redefining Canadian* case, where the project is complex with many aspects and runs over a long period of time.

An open process with good interpersonal communication is crucial to the success of a project. Projects should always be designed to benefit both the researcher and project participants equally. The *Redefining Canadian* project was a reciprocal arrangement in which I acquired access to a community of participants and partners to engage in collaborative research with, and the youth acquired video training, an opportunity to create and disseminate their own media and ideas, and research experience.

## 5.2 Limitations

From the outset of this project, the collective intention was for the research activities to be fully participatory. The MYCA youth were to take on a large role in video production and be collaborative partners in the academic write-up of the project. Although the former component was achieved, the latter was discussed on several occasions but eventually dropped. As a result, this paper is solely self-produced and the opinions and perspectives provided herein are those of my own. Four of the MYCA youth gave important feedback on a draft of this paper and contributed to the version you see here. The video research and production aspects of the project were all-consuming for both myself and for the youth participants and neither they nor I gave the writing component the same weight in terms of time and attention for a collaborative written research paper to be accomplished. The work of *We Interrupt This Program* (San Francisco-based non-profit) is a model for training youth and community members to conduct studies of the media and to publish writings on their findings. It remains to be seen, and experimented with, how effective combining these two modes of production (video and writing) can actually be. Certainly, maintaining project momentum and acquiring proper resources (funds, training, and support staff) are large considerations.

### 5.3 Opportunities and future directions

This project has resulted in a plethora of opportunities for the youth as both filmmakers and facilitators<sup>6</sup>. The continuing opportunities testify to the growing awareness that immigrant and refugee youth have an important and positive role to play in our communities. The MYCA youth are inspirational leaders and mentors to immigrant and refugee youth, as well as to others who also face societal discrimination. The *Redefining Canadian* project is a testament to the potential power and effectiveness of video and action research in bringing about individual empowerment and community-based social change. It was a catalyst for shifting the MYCA group from being marginalized by the media to being media producers, and the project's legacy lives on in the MYCA filmmakers' continued exposure and the media productions the youth continue to make. It is the hope of many of the people involved in the *Redefining Canadian* project that we will be able to find a sustainable source of funding or be able to establish a community economic development initiative in order to run an annual video program for immigrant, refugee, and First Nations youth locally.

Participatory filmmaking and action research as a combined concept and practice needs exposure and further experimentation to be accepted in both academic and community spheres. The *Redefining Canadian* project embraces these ideas and puts them to practice, however, it

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<sup>6</sup> As a direct result of their involvement in this project, individual MYCA filmmakers have received paid work to present their films and facilitate workshops on media literacy. They have also been hired to do the video documentation of a number of roundtable discussions on the use of the arts in cross-cultural conflict resolution for a local team of law scholars. Alisa, Kat, Jerry, Pam and Francisco were all selected to participate in the *National Film Board's Youth in Action Forum*, a day-long offering of workshops on numerous artistic forms. In July of 2004, Kat went to Ottawa to participate in a month-long youth social entrepreneurship training and came back with a business plan to develop *First Generation Media* – a small business for the MYCA youth to generate income and maintain their filmmaking skills. Francisco won a *2005 B.C. Youth Week Award* in "Outstanding Personal Development" for his role in "producing a short film and documentary with the *MY Circle Action* video project that challenges the images, stories and representation of newcomers in the media". He also received a bursary from the *Immigrant Services Society of B.C.* for his voluntary contribution to the project. Alisa has since completed many more videos for the *Students' Commission* and her high school assignments, in addition to having won a scholarship for a week-long *National Film Board* training session at the *Gulf Islands Film and Television School*. Pam won a scholarship to the *Earth Symposium*, an international forum on the use of arts in activism, where she helped to make a documentary video on the event. The MYCA filmmakers and other My Circle peer support group youth facilitators are working with the *Access to Media Education Society* to produce a series of short videos on health messages related to smoking for immigrants and refugees in the Fall of 2005.

should be recognized that several other organizations and video schools in the Vancouver area have been doing excellent work in this realm for a decade. The *Access to Media Education Society (AMES)*, *Gulf Islands Film and Television School (GIFTS)*, *Pacific Cinematheque's* Education Program, the *Indigenous Media Arts Group (IMAG)*, *Projections*, and SFU Communication's own *Applied Media Lab*, all do exceptional and extensive work with individual youth, and community groups, to further the progress of responsible ethnography and media making. They may not call it ethnography, or action research, or participatory filmmaking, but their work is effectively enabling thousands of youth, many of whom experience marginalization, to create films and tell very important personal stories. Those stories have inspired this project, and *Redefining Canadian* is but a continuation of that ongoing legacy of youth filmmaking that has helped to put Vancouver on the map as a vibrant hub of youth culture and activism.

There is a real need for the academic community to support the work of local youth film and video organizations to further the specific cause of using video as an effective community tool to create better and more frequent media on significant yet underrepresented populations. One example of a worthwhile action research study would be to analyse, archive, and make available for exhibition and/or broadcast, the thousands of videos that have been produced by youth through these groups. Such a project is needed to assist their collaboration and to secure more stable funding for what is a prolific youth arts sector. By further directing the results of this project to mainstream media providers and the Canadian Radio-Television Commission, a case could be made to influence media policies that determine the sources and delivery of Canadian content and programming.

The many successes of the *Redefining Canadian* project "represented" here will hopefully serve as an important contribution to the role of the arts, especially video, in qualitative and community-based research. The use of video in action research projects is a constructive, creative, and democratic direction to take for both researchers and members of communities. For a community group, the significance of an academic partnership may translate to greater legitimacy in the findings produced, increased awareness of problems and their solutions, and the

potential for accessing research and other types of funding. For academics, community partnership projects provide opportunities to produce research relevant to society's most practical and pressing issues. Research funding is becoming more available for more socially relevant research and students are beginning to demand more practical experiences for the 'real-life' job market. Innovative, action research projects carry enormous potential as social change vehicles and they deserve the resources and advocacy that is necessary from research institutions and communities alike.

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## Appendix A: The Multicultural Youth Circle Program



### Multicultural Youth Circle Program (MY CIRCLE)

Immigrant Services Society of BC

MY Circle is an innovative youth program, based on a grass-roots peer support model, that helps immigrant and refugee youth between the ages of 14-24 to:

- Break their social isolation
- Learn new skills
- Exchange coping strategies
- Gather information and resources
- Develop community capacity building opportunities

The primary goal of the program is to empower newcomer youth to actively participate and positively integrate into Canadian Society by creating safe, confidential and supportive environments where they can gain validation and understanding around the complex issues of adjustment and integration.

The MY Circle Program delivers three training sessions annually to 60-80 newcomer youth volunteers who learn how to become peer support group facilitators and community leaders. Our comprehensive 80-hour training is divided into two components:

- Facilitation Skills: taught by the Kinex Team of the SHRA and;
- Cross-Cultural Societal Issues: taught by the Immigrant Services Society of BC.

Our training program focuses on topics such as; self-awareness and basic counselling skills, communication, physical and mental health, racism, discrimination, bullying, violence and personal coping strategies. We also partner with mainstream youth organizations who deliver topic specific workshops and inform the youth of the resources and services available to them across the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD).



Once the training is complete, our volunteer facilitators go back out into their communities and work with local host organizations to deliver 20-25 peer support groups to other newcomer youth across the GVRD.

Over the past three years, the Multicultural Youth Circle has gained provincial and national profile through media attention. The program has been featured in several newspaper articles, television news features and CBC radio. Our youth have been invited to speaking engagements across Canada where they have participated on a number of presentations at various symposiums and conferences. They have delivered a variety of educational workshops at schools and community centres raising awareness on the issues that multicultural youth face. Many are making very positive contributions in their communities through their volunteer work with mainstream organizations. Others have secured employment as facilitators and youth outreach workers in various organizations. The program is helping young newcomers increase their active participation and positive integration into Canadian society.

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## **Appendix B: Multicultural Youth Circle Action's "Letter to the Editor"**

As young immigrants and refugees in Canada we grow up in our new country surrounded by stereotypes and a lack of diverse images in the media.

Since December of 2002, Immigrant Services of B.C. – MY Circle Program has trained immigrant and refugee youth as facilitators to deliver peer support groups for newcomer youth in the Greater Vancouver Area. The launch of the support groups sparked the interest of the local, provincial and national media, who sold our stories like Britney Spears CDs to the general public. What we saw as our opportunity to share our experiences was often disempowering. We were misunderstood and misrepresented.

The Redefining Canadian Project is our "Letter to the Editor". It is our response to the inaccurate media portrayal and our way to express our own perspectives and ideas, not only as immigrants and refugee youth, but also as people beyond our migratory status. In a period of five weeks, and with the help of lead mentor/filmmaker, Joah Lui, the MY Circle Action Team, Immigrant Services Society of B.C. and Video In Studios, we learned the process of filmmaking and created the four short films that make up Redefining Canadian. The films reflect our individual dreams and realities told from our own perspectives. By becoming filmmakers, we took responsibility for our own portrayal.

We want to engage in a dialogue with the media, challenge the stereotypes and offer alternative perspectives on issues pertaining to immigrant and refugee youth. We hope to bring awareness and open up discussion on these issues in the mainstream. This project is our way of saying "we exist and we are more than just drug dealers and high school dropouts."

As you watch Redefining Canadian, we want you to think about:

"What assumptions are you making when you hear me speak with an accent?"

"How does a newcomer youth overcome the fear of being isolated and ignored?"

"How different am I just because I'm an immigrant or a refugee?"

"How often are our expressions respectfully portrayed?"

For more information, please contact us:

Katrina Ao, Francisco Granados, Alisa Shaykhullina and Pam Verma

Multicultural Youth Circle Action

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Appendix C: Photos

# Redefining Canadian

Available at [www.sfu.ca/media-lab/grad/joahl](http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/grad/joahl)



*Do You Speak Canadian?*  
By Kat Ao



*The Best Is Yet to Come*  
By Jerry Leung



*Three Worlds*  
By Alisa Shaykhullina

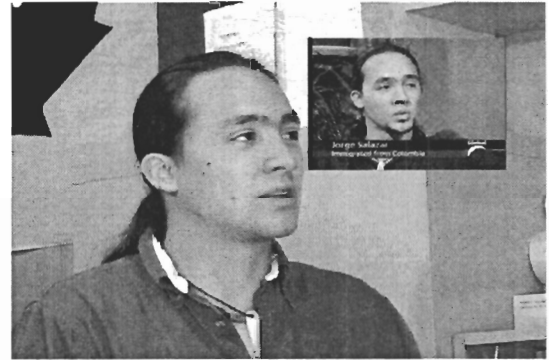


*Winter Son*  
By Francisco-Fernando Granados

# Mediatosis

By Kat Ao, Francisco-Fernando Granados, Alisa Shaykhullina, Brett Tsinigine, Pam Verma

Available at [www.sfu.ca/media-lab/grad/joahl](http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/grad/joahl)



# Informed Consent Form for the Redefining Canadian Video Strategy and Research Project

## Introduction

My name is Joah Lui and I am the coordinator and lead mentor for the Multicultural Youth Circle Video Project called "Redefining Canadian". I am also a graduate student in the Department of Communication at Simon Fraser University. As a part of my Masters degree, I will be co-producing the videos with the M Y Circle youth filmmakers and writing a forty-page paper about the project, the process, the actions that evolve out of the project, and the issues addressed by the youth around voice, identity, integration, migration, immigration, racism, and anti-racism.

## Project Description

This project has arisen out of a need for immigrant and refugee youth, and their communities, to gain control of their images and stories. This project enables six youth (aged 15 to 26) to develop skills in short film and democratic media production with the mentorship of video artists, filmmakers, and television professionals, and a participatory process through which community members may offer feedback.

The project will run from February 28 to July 1 and involve the youth in training workshops, film production, editing, screenings and discussions with members of the youths' families and communities, high schools, community centres, newcomer youth support groups, and public audiences.

## Research Description

I wish to videotape some of these activities and maintain a project journal to record my thoughts and reflections for my research. These tapes and reflections will be available to the youth filmmakers. I intend to write about the youths' experiences as I have observed them or as they have been revealed to me in discussions. I hope to be able to publish a completed research paper on this project. I will not reveal the youths identities or identifiable characteristics within any publications.

## Minimal Risk

This research project has passed the Simon Fraser University Ethics Review and has been allocated a "Minimal Risk" designation. I do not anticipate any harm will come to the youth filmmakers through their participation in this project. However, due diligence to safety and common sense must accompany all decisions, travel in the Lower Mainland, and interactions with film subjects, crew, volunteers, and members of the public. In case of emotional or psychological distress, Carmen Munoz and Heather Turnbull, of the Immigrant Services Society Multicultural Peer Support Program, or myself are available to give support.

For inquiries about this research please contact:

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## Invitation to participate

I agree to participate in the research component of the M Y Circle Video Project:  yes  no

I am 18 years or older:  yes  no

Please give your name \_\_\_\_\_ and signature \_\_\_\_\_

If under 18, please include your parent/guardian's name \_\_\_\_\_ and signature \_\_\_\_\_