THE VOICES OF WARRIORS: URBAN GIRLS UNITE

TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AND VICTIMIZATION

by

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In the
School
of
Criminology

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Spring 2006

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory project materialized through the *"Girlz Group,"* a community-university partnership responding to the social development challenges of First Nation's girls in an inner city environment. Using participatory action research (PAR), feminist and intersectionality frameworks, I document the continuum of violence and victimization the girls have faced, and the survival skills they have learned as they come of age in their community. A bricolage of methods was used to document the experiences including focus groups, questionnaires, and consultation interviews. In narrative form, I make meaning of the roles of systemic forces such as racialization, gendering, poverty, and colonization in sustaining their vulnerability to violence. The results highlight the importance of including marginalized youth voices in the design and delivery of violence prevention programs, and the value of collaborative research methods in mobilizing youth commitment towards social change.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the *Girlz Group* participants, including their families, and their friends. Girls, I will never forget you. You are always in my thoughts and prayers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

AFRCV – Alliance of Five Research Centres Against Violence

CACSW – Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women

FAS – Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

NWAC – Native Women's Association of Canada

PAR – Participatory Action Research

INTRODUCTION

*Little Star (Age 20) is a young, kind-hearted, and broke
First Nation's woman. She is a sister, an auntie, a daughter, and
a life giver. She is growing up homeless in the inner city. These
are the different categories that make up her identity. In most
instances, her gender, race and social class play a role in her
everyday experiences, while others rarely come into play.*

Little Star[1] is one of fifteen young First Nation's[2] girls who have participated in

my thesis project through her involvement in the *Girlz Group* over the last two years. The

Girlz Group is a participatory action research (PAR) group that was created in 2003 to

respond to the vulnerabilities to violence created by the structures of inequality such as

racism, sexism, and poverty as represented in their experiences growing up in the inner

city. They are survivors of colonization – they are women warriors. Their experiences of

everyday violence are the focus of this thesis.

The experience of violence in its many forms is an everyday reality for Canada's

First Nation's women and girls. This reality stands in strong contrast to Canada's

reputation as an international leader in the promotion of the human rights of women.

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[1] Pseudonyms are used to maintain the anonymity of the participants of this thesis.

[2] In this paper, I use many terms interchangeably with "First Nation's" to describe Canadian citizens who identify themselves as ancestors of the original inhabitants of Canada, including Status Indian, Métis, Inuit, and Non-Status Indian. The terms used throughout this paper are: First Nations, Aboriginal, Native, Indian, and Indigenous. The terms used are written according to the source referred to, whether it is scholarly, legal, or the girls themselves. I use the term "First Nation's" most frequently, as the girls indicated this is the term they preferred I use in my own discourse with them.

Violence crosses all boundaries of identity, but the First Nation's Girl Child[3] in particular is most vulnerable due to her marginalized social location as a young racialized minority woman. With fewer rights and less respect in society due to her young age, routinely facing racism based on stereotypes of First Nation's people, and sexual harassment based on her female gender, the First Nation's Girl Child faces enormous challenges to her well being.

First Nation's girls face an enhanced level of violence as estimated by self-report research studies. For instance, McIvor & Nahanee (1998) estimate that 75% of First Nation's girls 18 years of age or less have been abused (McIvor & Nahanee, 1998). In a study based in Canada's Northwest Territories, an 80% sexual assault rate was found for girls under the age of eight (Gurr, Mailloux, Kinnon, and Doerage, 1999). The Alliance of Five Research Centres against Violence in Canada (AFRCV) reviewed the vulnerability faced by Aboriginal girls in Canada, and noted this group faces a broad continuum of violence, including higher rates of hospitalisation for attempting suicide, and state level violence enforced through child apprehension and foster home placements (1999). These state-level practices are implicated as allowing the colonization of Canada's First Nation's peoples to continue (AFRCV, 1999). As a group, First Nation's girls regularly face all forms of abuse including high rates of sexual harassment and racism across all social contexts of their lives, and struggle with higher levels of poverty, homelessness, and sexual exploitation than non-First Nation's girls.

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[3] The "Girl Child" is a United Nation's defined population category for a female child aged zero to 18. Her category was defined as a priority for research and action to promote the elimination of violence against women and children.

The theoretical scholarship informing violence against First Nation's women and girls has developed primarily along two parallel lines of critical discourses: traditional feminism and anti-racism (See Collins, 1998). Taken separately, these two discourses fail to adequately explore the simultaneous effects of multiple forms of oppression, with the former discourse developing through a primarily gender-based lens exploring sexism, misogyny and patriarchal relations, and the latter a racially based lens, interrogating stereotyping, racism, and white supremacy. The root causes of the violence faced by First Nation's women and girls are complex, and cannot be attributed to primarily patriarchal relations or systemic racism. While there is no denying that these discourses have substantially contributed to furthering the quality of life for women and Canada's visible minorities, there is a need for research focused on understanding how violence is furthered by interlocking oppressions that cannot be understood in piecemeal.

The interlocking effects of sexism, racism and poverty represent complex systems of domination, which markedly shape the reality, life chances, and choices that are available to girls. These systems of domination create multiple spheres of inequality that support and sustain each other. Failure to recognize the dynamic and inseparable consequences of interlocking forms of oppression will perpetuate the discrimination and violence the Aboriginal Girl Child faces. These multiple forms of oppression can undermine the development of a positive sense of self and social identity.

The central aim of this exploratory thesis is to make meaning of the everyday experiences of violence in adolescent Aboriginal girls lives from a framework of intersectionality. This research involved an innovative partnership of both academic and community voices to apply an intersectional analysis of the vulnerability to violence

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faced by the Aboriginal Girl Child in the inner city context. This work is carried out towards the development of relevant solutions to their lived realities. The *Girlz Group* participants of this project simultaneously negotiate the psychosocial, economic, raced, gendered, classed, and socio-cultural borders of their social location as they come of age. In this thesis, I discuss from a framework of intersectionality how my young participants have survived through the evident permanence of violence in their lives and reflect on the survival skills they have developed along the way. This project involves a unique application of intersectionality to the lives of inner city Aboriginal girls, thereby contributing to both the fields of violence against women and to the theory of intersectionality. Furthermore, through a process of action and research, this thesis additionally engaged the participants in action against social injustices that affect their lives, towards the goals of emancipation and social change.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In chapter one, the theoretical and methodological frameworks supporting this research are discussed in depth. I discuss the principles of research I have drawn from and the theoretical and analytical tool of intersectionality. In doing so, I place myself in relation to the subject matter as well as my social location and I address the ethical questions that arise from the nature of the research subject.

In the second chapter, I review the literature on the continuum of violence faced by First Nation's girls in Canada. Furthermore, the continuum of violence they face is placed in an historical context. This chapter demonstrates the importance of exploring the intersections of their identities to become better attuned to the needs of this

marginalized population. In the concluding section of this chapter, I define violence in an intersectional context.

In chapter three, I discuss the research sample, data collection procedures, and the analytical strategies used to make meaning of the participant voices. Furthermore, I describe the research techniques of focus groups and interviews.

In chapter four, I provide a narrated account of the process of data collection, from how focus groups were used to cycle the observations made through the research to co-analysis of findings. This narrative account explains the process by which participatory action research and the intersectional method was applied in this thesis.

In chapter five, I make meaning of the main points of analysis discussed through the group narrative; namely, the operation of intersecting oppressions experienced by Little Star in the classroom environment, the lack of fit of the social welfare system to the experiences of Raven, and the vulnerabilities to violence felt by Winona in her experience of sexual harassment.

Finally, in my conclusion, I discuss the implications of these findings, the limitations of this study, and future directions for research. Furthermore, I include some *Girlz Group'* recommendations for program development to prevent the continued vulnerability to violence faced by First Nation's girls and assist them to regain their voice and their power.

CHAPTER ONE:
THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL
IMPERATIVES

Principles of feminist (Fonow & Cook, 1984; Burman, Batchelor & Brown, 2001), participatory action (Berg, 2004) and intersectionality frameworks (Cuádrez & Uttal, 1999) have been important sources of design for the current project and have implied a number of research design imperatives that have structured my theoretical standpoint and methodological decision-making. These frameworks have been selected for many reasons, such as their epistemological positioning, their conceptual fit with the research team, their pragmatic value, and their orientation toward empowerment and social change.

While there is no singular feminist perspective, Cook & Fonow (1986) have identified several common principles of feminist research that I feel nicely reflect the approach taken in this project and which differentiate it from a positivist approach. Researchers subscribing to feminist principles will generally do the following: 1) Focus on and commit to reducing inequality based on gender and improving the conditions under which marginalized women live; 2) privilege the subjective everyday experiences of women and other marginalized groups; 3) be self-reflexive about how their personal biography (such as sex, race, age, social class), and broader conditions of the social world, politics, and the economy, influence the research process; and 4) make special efforts to reduce their own power over the research process, and to give more power to the research participants (Cook & Fonow, 1986).

Intersectionality

I agree with feminist scholars who argue that the experiences of First Nation's women as victims of violence exemplifies complex and intersecting forms of oppression, and that these oppressions combine to create vulnerabilities for particular groups to violence (Crenshaw, 1995; Razack, 1998). Jiwani (2002a) notes that the combined effect of systemic processes such as racism and patriarchal violence, create a situation of unique and extreme vulnerability.

The anti-essentialist, intersectional approach that I adopt has safeguarded the research from the possibility that my investigation of race, class and gender issues will reinforce the structures of racism and sexism, an assurance that is considered important according within the intersectionality paradigm (Grillo, 1995). Anti-essentialism and intersectional critiques require that experiences be defined as close to their full complexity as possible and that voices in the margins are not ignored. Grillo (1995) offers some words of wisdom that I feel address some of the ethical questions raised. "[E]ach of us has a limited view of the world, [sic] we have a better chance of forming a vision of a post-patriarchal, post-racist society both by trusting in our own experiences and by seeking out voices that are drowned out by essentialism in all its forms." (Grillo, 1995, p. 30). Accordingly, this project invited the voices of girls marginalized by virtue of their female gender, their young age, their Aboriginal ancestry, and their experiences of growing up in an inner city environment. The young girls of this project were invited to speak about the experiences they share with each other by virtue of their shared social locations, but to also speak about the differences between themselves, and how the categories of their lives affect their lived realities. This is a process that I as the

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facilitator of the group also participated in, and the project has in turn had a profound impact on my self-awareness of my social location.

Participatory action research (PAR), like feminist approaches, respects the experiential knowledge of oppressed persons and pursues this knowledge to effect social change (Maguire, 1987). However, in a participatory approach, more emphasis is placed on the central involvement of participants who are actively involved in all stages of the research as a co-inquirer (Hall, 1981). This democratic research process is seen as necessary to breakdown the role distinction between researcher and the researched (Jones, 2000), to alter the traditional function of researcher power from one of "power-over" to that of "power-with" (Ristock & Pennell, 1996), and to ensure that the research remains grounded in the relevant issues of the oppressed groups and not in the researcher's agenda (Wilkins, 2000).

The participatory approach was particularly suited for this project as the impetus for the research was rooted in the need expressed by the community of the oppression of young Aboriginal women, and we all expressly shared a desire to empower these youth to effect change in their own lives. Although PAR has its advantages, it involves many challenges as consensus in the design and method are often difficult to achieve (Jones, 2000) and disagreement and conflict in the PAR process frequently occurs (Reason, 1994). Additionally, the gold standard of a strict PAR approach has to be continuously negotiated against the constraints of timelines, and budget restrictions. Nonetheless, I felt that a PAR approach was necessary to gain the cooperation of all the young First Nation's participants, and that the social change potential of this approach, that is, the

possibility that this research makes a *real difference* in the lives of the participants, made the inevitable struggles meaningful and worthwhile.

Through the design and execution of this project, I have embraced the principles of feminism and PAR at a broad level, but more specifically, a framework of intersectionality. The intersectionality approach is still in its infancy. Although the streams of influence of intersectionality include the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's and 1970's, the growing inclusion of women of colour into the academy (Cuádrez & Uttal, 1999), and post-structural feminism (1980's), it is only very recently that the concept of intersectionality has been clearly defined (see Collins, 1990; Razack, 1998, Dei, 2001), and that methodological strategies of intersectional analyses have been advanced (see Crenshaw, 1995; Collins, 1995; Essed, 2003; Cuádrez & Uttal, 1999). Indeed, in a recent review of the intersectionality literature, McCall (2003) concludes that Kimberle Crenshaw probably first highlighted the term in 1989.

Intersectionality provides a theoretical and analytical framework for examining how structural systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism; intersect to stratify the location of women in society hierarchically (Razack, 1998; Krane, Oxman-Martinez & Ducey, 2000). One proposition of this framework is that women of colour, such as Aboriginal women, stand at the intersections of race and gender categories such that their experiences cannot be captured only by theories of racial oppression or gender oppression, nor their union (Krane, Oxman-Martinez & Ducey, 2000). As an analytical tool, intersectionality provides a method to research and respond to the different ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how such

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intersections contribute to differing experiences to unique experiences of oppression and privilege (Symington, 2004).

In response to critiques waged against traditional feminisms and anti-racist discourses to theorize beyond a single axis of oppression (see Collins, 1998), intersectionality considers how an aggregate of oppressions converge simultaneously and dynamically (Brewer, 1999). Intersectionality attempts to make visible the process by which intersecting forces of dynamic oppressions operate to make the lives of women perceptibly invisible, and powerless (Crenshaw, 1995).

In a landmark paper in the field of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1995) applied an intersectionality approach to the study of battered women to inform how professional interventions, such as shelters, can be designed to be responsive to the intersections of their lives. As an example of this need, she explains "[s]helter policies are often shaped by an image that locates women's subordination primarily in the psychological effects of male domination, and thus overlooks the socio-economic factors that often disempower women of colour" (Crenshaw, 1991, as cited in Crenshaw, 1995, p. 13). What is more, due to a lack of research directed towards understanding the needs of racialized communities, service delivery policies may be designed on the assumption that the needs of the majority apply to all women (Krane, Oxman-Martinez & Ducey, 2000). According to Crenshaw (1995), the everyday lives of women of colour "are shaped by a different set of obstacles" (p. 13). As a result, the vast body of literature addressing the front-line social justice needs of women in general is of limited value to the design of sensitive and effective frontline and policy response to the lives of coloured women.

Developing a methodological framework to study the intersectionality of race, class and gender through interlocking systems of oppression is not an easy process, but methodological strategies have recently been put forth (See Cuádrez & Uttal, 1999; Collins, 1998; Essed, 2003). Collins (1998) maintains "one approach to developing intersectional analyses consists of selecting a specific social location, social practice, group history, or topic, and subjecting it to an intersectional analysis" (p. 13). This project draws on the narratives of young women situated at the marginal intersections of class, gender, and race categories. It is in the intersection of these categories, and within the context of the interlocking forces of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, that my participants are located. It is from this context that I accessed my participants and explored their stories of survival of the various forms of violence they face.

I believe that the notion of intersectionality provides a theoretical basis through which oppressive structures can be disputed and through which partnerships and coalitions addressing oppressive structures can be supported. While Collins (1998) approach is employed as my starting point, the intersectionality analytical framework of Essed (2003)[4] is employed to interpret the findings of my study.

While the intersectional approach may involve a little more purposeful exploration in the direction of questions than a strictly exploratory, grounded theory approach, this perspective privileges the voices and lives of those included in the study over the theories and agenda of the researcher (Cuádrez & Uttal, 1999). The everyday experiences of the lives of women are considered to be the most important sources of insight in an intersectional analysis because they are capable of "demonstrating how convergent dimensions and systems operate simultaneously" (Essed, 2003, p. 1).

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[4] Essed's analytical framework is discussed further in chapter four of this report.

The place of theory in an intersectional approach is as a flexible guide that will enable critical engagement of the participant voices at the stage of analysis. The theory is not employed to shape the responses of the youth because intersectionality research should emphasize agency and self-definition through the research process (Cuádrez & Uttal, 1999), a principle of conducting research that fits well with my participatory, feminist orientation. An intersectional study should encourage women to take their experiences seriously, and to recognize their own strength and potential (Essed, 2003). The close relationships I developed with the young women of this study have allowed me to provide such encouragement along the way.

A final design imperative of an intersectional study is to highlight women's experiences in their full diversity. Special efforts were made to allow the girls to define themselves on their own terms. Additionally, analytical strategies that highlight the diversity of experiences, as well as the commonalities, were used.

Ethical Considerations

Lofland and Lofland (1984) suggest there are two questions a researcher should ask themselves before doing social research and which I have addressed. The first question is "Should this particular group, setting or question be studied by anyone?" (in Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 104). To answer this question, the researcher should consider whether the research can be harmful to the cause, for instance, would the research support or legitimate racist or sexist attitudes? The second question is "should this group, setting, or question be studied by me?" (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 105). This question presented an ethical quandary with respect to the characteristics of my social location as a Caucasian woman of higher-class status is likely

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to affect the research. In response to this question, I have pondered continuously

throughout this project how my difference from my participants, based on my social

location, impinges upon and/or contributes to the development of valid knowledge. For

instance, as a white woman from a privileged economic background, I have not shared

many of the experiences that the young women have related to me.

Along the same lines of ethical consideration, Valdivia (2002), in her assessment

of the ethical quandaries associated with race, class and gender research posed several

questions a feminist project should assess. Her analysis considered the appropriateness

of a powerful group doing research with a less powerful or dependent group, the

exploitive potential of this type of research, and what benefit this kind of research brings

to the research participants (Valdivia, 2002). Central to her assessment is the writing of

bell hooks[5] who writes specifically about the issue of writing the experiences of groups

that one does not belong to – the question is one of "who speaks for whom." The

disparity of power and access to the means of publication and writing are ethical

concerns. Hooks notes, that "[w]hen we write about the experiences of a group to which

we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our actions, considering whether or

not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination" (1989, in Valdivia,

2002, pp. 43-44).

Valdivia's (2002) analysis brings up the question of the reciprocal nature of

"power-knowledge" to knowledge production activities, such as research. A key

imperative in feminist research, as described earlier, is to breakdown the power

differentials that exist between the researcher and the researched beyond simply creating

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[5] The small case letters used to spell bell hooks name are not typing errors. The author has chosen to represent her name this way (Valdivia, 2002).

an egalitarian atmosphere (Gelsthorpe, 1991). In order to address the inherent imbalance of power held by the researcher, the PAR process I implemented provided the participants with the opportunities to have their perspectives heard. Furthermore, they were encouraged to: 1) take leadership roles in directing how questions were asked, 2) advise about the procedures used to answer the questions, and 3) take part in the collection and analysis of results. This strategy served the dual process of maintaining the validity of the information collected, it further reduces the chance that the participants will feel exploited through a process suited to benefit the researcher.

Ristock and Pennell (1996) provide a compelling discussion of the power issue in researcher-participant relationships. They maintain that researchers must be aware of the power they hold over research participants, and no single design element can reconcile the imbalance. Unequal power is assumed to remain even though numerous design steps were taken to circumvent "power-over" the participants, such as explicitly stating goals of empowerment, exercising respectful relationships with participants, and advancing socially useful research questions. Ristock and Pennell's (1996) central recommendation to managing the power imbalance is for the researcher to be continuously reflexive of his/her own perspective as the research progresses, and be willing to adjust the research focus as temptations towards using power present themselves. Failure to continuously monitor power's ubiquitous nature would create space for exploitation to occur. In fact, throughout this process there were times where I was frustrated with the slow pace at which the research proceeded due to the necessity to be responsive to a change in direction of the focus of the research. However, some of the most valuable developments in group process and knowledge building occurred through the process of attending to

deviations from process. For instance, several group meeting agendas focused on group concerns over food menus, and resolving disagreements among the group members and between the girls and group facilitators. These power plays were managed through a safe process of group problem solving, and application of ethical standards as well as the principles of engagement developed by the *Girlz Group*.

Researching 'sensitive topics' such as girls' experiences and views of violence is very challenging because it raises the degree of ethical responsibilities on the part of the researcher (Burman, Batchelor & Brown, 1997; Lee, 1993). Lee and Renzetti, (1990) define 'sensitive' research topics as the kinds that "potentially involve a level of threat or risk to those studied which renders problematic the collection, holding and/or dissemination of research data" (in Lee, 1993, p. 4). For instance, I attended to concerns about the extent to which the process of social research itself may increase the vulnerability of these youths, the need to maintain confidentiality and the potential legal ramifications of disclosures of criminal activity or abuse.

The theoretical imperatives structuring my research approach, combined with the capricious and sensitive nature of the research topic (violence) presented some methodological, analytical, and ethical design quandaries for my research. For instance, one issue that arose was my decision to involve the youth workers of the inner city community school as co-facilitators of the *Girlz Group*. Although the existing relationship of trust with the youth is an asset towards generating valid knowledge of the girl's experiences, care must be taken not to put this relationship of trust in jeopardy. From a feminist perspective, "any intervention risks the possibility of disrupting relationships that are personally satisfying to the participants" (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p.

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8). Fonow and Cook (1991) contend that women more readily identify with women researchers, and may be more willing to share information and to trust in confidentiality, despite its limitations. Extreme care was taken to protect the relationship from the technical, legal, and political consequences of research. For instance, I facilitated several meetings with this projects' research advisory team[6] early on to contemplate the many potentially harmful scenarios that could arise from the research, and together we developed strategies to protect the young participants. Furthermore, informed consent was gathered from participants continuously throughout the process, and the potential risks and benefits of the research were discussed with the participants in dialogue so that questions and concerns could be raised and addressed together[7].

In a critical paradigm, the researcher should take on the role of "instigator" and "facilitator" and thus the values of the researcher necessarily enter the equation. As such, critical research places the particular demand upon researchers "to make explicit how their own class status, ethnic or gender orientation, and power relationships relative to research participants affect what is investigated and how data are interpreted" (Schram, 2003, p. 35). Through countless interactions of formal and informal group process, I have expressed my personal and theoretical assumptions and beliefs that impact the research effort, including my interests for becoming involved in the research initially (Wilkins, 2000). In the initial stages of the groups' process, all participants of the

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[6] The research advisory team met regularly throughout the development and implementation of my research. The team consisted of Dr. Margaret Jackson, Professor in the School of Criminology, SFU, Dr. Marlene Moretti, as clinical supervisor, Professor of Psychology, SFU, Ron Scott, Community Schools' Coordinator, the two youth workers, Gladys Evoy and Shelley MacDonald, and myself. Additionally, a youth advisory team of participants from the Girlz Group were involved at key decision-making stages of the research, and in times of problem solving of group process.
[7] Due to related issues of confidentiality, I have not used a small selection of experiences shared in the analysis, as directed by the research team.

project were encouraged to share their backgrounds, perspectives of violence, and the processes of research engagement that they would be comfortable sharing in.

Social location and the interviewer-participant relationship

Researchers influenced by a critical agenda have become increasingly aware of problems with interviewing that have been largely overlooked, such as the relationship boundaries between interviewer and participants, issues of representation, and the traditional patriarchal relations in interviewing. In this section, I articulate the importance of this epistemological and ethical issue and explain my integration of methodological strategies to address them.

My evaluation of this design issue borrows from Huisman (1997), who writes about her decision-making process as a white woman conducting a qualitative study on the topic of violence against women of colour. She asks: "Can a white female researcher studying the experiences of women of colour enlarge our knowledge and understanding of the social world? Can white women understand the experiences of groups that have been deemed (by whites) as outsiders?" (Huisman, 1997, p. 179). The first two questions concern epistemology while the latter concerns the ethical appropriateness of the research itself. I will start by considering the first two questions.

The first question, reframed, basically asks whether white women can come to know the social world of women of colour? The underlying assumption of this question is, that by virtue of their lack of shared experience, based on race or ethnicity, white women may not be capable of truly "knowing" women of colour. Therefore, if a white woman (or man for that matter) were to try to represent the experiences of women of

colour through direct research, the very legitimacy of the research may be undermined. The degree of "legitimacy" that may be subscribed to research involving the white researcher- "coloured" participant dyad has been conceptualized by Huisman (1997) as falling on an epistemological continuum of the degree to which "race" or "ethnicity" matter in research pursuits.

Huisman (1997) explains that on one side of the continuum is the positivist "no difference camp." On this end of the continuum, race is considered irrelevant to knowing social phenomena. The methodological implication of this perspective is that all human beings are equally capable of knowing women of colour – that social location has no bearing on research. This perspective naturally ignores that systems of power exist, and denies that personal subjectivities of the researcher play any role in the research process (Huisman, 1997). This view is inconsistent with my theoretical perspective as I disagree with the view that research is value-free. On the other end of the continuum is the camp that claims, "race is the primary heuristic device" (p. 180). The methodological implication of this perspective is that the more oppression that a person suffers, the clearer their vision of the social world will be.

The camps at the opposing ends of this continuum not only vary in the degree to which the race factor should effect the design of a research study, but also the degree to which subjectivity is valued in the research process (Huisman, 1997). So whereas the camp on the left of the continuum would contend that subjectivity has no place in the research process, and clouds the ability of the researcher to see the "truth," the opposing camp would see subjectivity as critical to a true assessment of any social phenomena.

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Somewhere between the two positions on this continuum falls the "interlocking systems" camp. Similar to the intersectionality perspective, this camp, shared by theorists such as Razack (1998) and Collins (1998), argues that race, class and gender systems cannot be separated from one another, and that we cannot assume one to take precedence over the other in terms of its relative impact on the lives of those in the social world (Dei, 2001). From the "interlocking systems" perspective, it is not denied that a white researcher can come to know the social world of a woman of colour. In other words, it is acceptable to research outside of your social location (Huisman, 1997). However, Huisman (1997) warns that it is important for the researcher to take care to not place their experiences at the centre of the inquiry, and the participants as peripheral. Essentially, the author makes a point to suggest that a researcher must be aware of their own biases, prejudices, and assumptions - to be aware that they hold experiences that shape their understanding of material they analyse. To keep my own biases, prejudices, and assumptions in check, I have kept field notes throughout the research process and a reflexive research journal. This strategy is valued as it has kept my analysis focused on the experiences of the participants through their own lens, and enabled them to create their own knowledge's based in their own agency.

Additionally, to respond to the disparity in experiences between the participants, and myself, I take advice from Kirby and McKenna (1989). Although they would argue that those who possess the lived experience in the margins will produce the most valid research about the margins, and are most ethically suited to do so, they feel it is possible for researchers to do margins research even where they do not share such experiences. The two requirements of this exception to the gold standards are: 1) that the researcher

collaborates with those close to the experience throughout the process, including taking direction for the focus of the research question; and 2) that the researcher clearly identifies her/his experiential self at the beginning of the research (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). The research approach I have chosen has satisfied these two requirements. With respect to the former requirement, I have employed a PAR approach, one that has involved the youth workers and the participants themselves in all stages of the research, including their input and participation in the design, analysis and dissemination of lessons learned from our collaboration. With respect to the latter requirement, our initial planning meetings with the girls and youth workers focused on talking about our backgrounds and experiences in order to identify common interests, and the variety of perspectives held by the group. This practice was valued, as it required all members of the research endeavour to identify their own subjectivities, to be transparent, and ultimately hold us accountable to others (as suggested by Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

Through the process of research, and the practice of journaling, I became aware of some of my own latent biases that reflected my adherence to European, Western values. The journaling process allowed me to openly explore how these values structured the questions I asked, and this self-awareness was crucial to my being open to viewing the discussion topics with an open mind. There are times when I shared stories about my own life experiences that related to, or differed from the experiences with the girls. The group environment we created allowed the facilitators and girls alike to feel comfortable sharing their differing experiences and views. Although I did share openly and honestly with the girls, I was careful to keep the focus of discussions centred on the lives of the girls and the experiences they viewed as important as opposed to my own.

Validity of Methodology

In this study, I aim to generate generalizable findings but to capture vivid accounts of the experiences of the young women of this project. I have adopted Patti Lather's (1991) articulation of concepts of construct, face and constructive validity that are relevant in a feminist approach:

> Construct validity requires that we recognize and confront the theoretical traditions within which we are operating and be willing to challenge and change them; in other words, it demands flexibility in the research design. Face validity is related to construct validity; its purpose is to ensure that your work makes sense to others. It is achieved by checking your analyses, descriptions, and conclusions with at least some of the participants in your research; this is the kind of 'reality' check that is part of reflexivity. Finally, catalytic validity is achieved when participants, and the broader community affected by the research, feel energized or re-oriented in some way by the project (as cited by Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 50).

The participatory approach I adopted is flexible, allowing me to adapt the style of the research to maximize space for youth to share their true experiences. The strategy of member checking was used throughout the various stages of the research process to ensure that analyses validly reflected the perspectives of the participants. Furthermore, evaluation of the degree to which participants felt energized, aware, and committed to social change was assessed through discussion and questioning periodically.

Beyond this, the inherent elements of the design of this project which contribute to its validity are 1) the pre-existing relationship of trust between the youth workers and

the participants, 2) the triangulation of interviewing, focus-groups, and my reflexive field observations in this process, and 3) the involvement of the girls in all stages of this PAR process. In the next chapter, I review the descriptive literature concerning the violence profiles of Canada's First Nation's girls and place their realities in social and historical context.

CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

*A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are
on the ground. Then it is finished, no matter how brave its warriors
or how strong its weapons. (Tsistsistas, Cheyenne).*

This quote nicely captures the social value that was accorded to First Nation's

women in Canada's pre-colonial history – the women are essential and valued for

promoting the sustenance of their nations. During Canada's colonization, women's

relatively powerful roles in First Nation's communities threatened efforts to assimilate

their culture into European lifestyles. Regardless of intent, the colonization of this

country slowly and systematically took away the power of First Nation's women, so

much so that they may effectively represent the single most economically deprived and

socially devalued portion of the Canadian people. In this chapter, I review the historical

context of the Canadian First Nation's Girl Child, the reality of violence they face in their

lives, and the research context driving my approach. The concept of violence as

employed in this research is explained from a framework of intersectionality. I employ

an understanding of the First Nation's Girl Child as a "warrior" as she continues to battle

to maintain and improve her social position. I begin by placing the First Nation's Girl

Child in historical context.

Historical Context

A review of the history of colonization is necessary to understand the current day

marginalized status of First Nation's people in Canada. Before European contact,

Canada's First Peoples persisted in their various nations with their own traditions, customs, values, beliefs, governments and laws (Baskin, 2003). These communities lived according to a holistic worldview, which stood in direct contrast to the European worldview of Christianity (Baskin, 2003). Traditional teachings for Aboriginal oral histories emphasize the equality of men and women, and the respect and honor they provided to each other for the gifts provided to them from the creator (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). The role of men was to provide food, shelter and clothing, while women were valued as the life givers, caring for the children, and further valued for their participation in governing their communities and in spiritual ceremonies (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991).

Through a process of invasion, settlement and nation building, the First People's economies, political institutions, spiritual and self-governing practices were overturned (Cuneen, 2001). The European colonization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada has had devastating consequences for Aboriginal nations, socio-culturally, economically, and politically (Stevenson, 1999). The new values and cultural standards of the Europeans were tremendously destructive to the communities and contributed to high rates of unemployment, a rise in suicides, alcoholism, and domestic violence (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). Economically, Aboriginal people first participated in the fur trade society, but gradually were removed from their land, and directed into reserve settlements with welfare economies (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). With such a change, men lost their traditional roles in the society as hunter-gatherers, and experienced role-strain, which had severe consequences as their communities re-negotiated the roles of community members to the operation of their nations.

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The Impact of Colonization on Aboriginal Women

This colonization has had the greatest negative impact on Aboriginal women (LaRoque, 2002) who lost their status as equals in their tribal communities. Most pre-contact First Nation's communities existed within a structure of matriarchy, where Aboriginal women were leaders of their nations. European patriarchy was forcefully imposed on Aboriginal communities in Canada "through the fur trade, missionary Christianity, and government policies" (LaRoque, 2002, p. 148). Aboriginal women resisted the imposition of patriarchy that threatened their autonomy as women, and the cohesion of their communities.

The Aboriginal women maintained a reasonable degree of power in their communities until the young nation state of Canada imposed two of the most damaging government policies which resulted in their dispossession through sexist "enfranchisement" provisions and their removal to residential schools (Amnesty International, 2004). As Stevenson (1999) indicates, "The overall intent of this legislation was to reduce First Nations' women to a condition of dependency on their male relatives (p. 74)."

"Enfranchisement" was the granting of Canadian citizenship to Aboriginal peoples who met criteria established through the *Indian Act, 1876*, and occurred through voluntary and involuntary processes. Enfranchised individuals lost their Indian Status. Women were differentially affected by Enfranchisement because their fathers or husbands held authority to enfranchise them against their will. Further, under the *Indian Act, 1876,* Aboriginal women who married non-Aboriginal men automatically lost their Indian status (and subsequently all future generations' status), whereas a non-Aboriginal

man who married an Aboriginal woman would gain Indian status (Stevenson, 1999, p. 69).

Canada's policy of assimilation forcefully required Aboriginal parents to send their school-aged children to residential schools to be raised and educated according to European Christian values. This was achieved through the addition of provisions to the *Indian Act, 1876* in 1894 that allowed Indian agents to literally "gather up" the children of parents did not send their children to school (Jacobs, 2002, p. 31). It is widely acknowledged that Aboriginal children faced a broad range of harmful abuses while attending these educational institutions – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, sexual, verbal, and cultural abuse. The effects of the abuse on Aboriginal people as a whole cannot be understated – it has been catastrophic. Jacobs (2002) captures the catastrophe by listing several of the significant losses suffered: "...a loss of culture, a loss of traditional values, a loss of Aboriginal languages, a loss of family bonding, a loss of parenting skills, a loss of self-respect, and a loss of respect for others." (Jacobs, 2002, p. 26). This loss, Jacobs (2002) continues, has been linked to widespread problems, including "alcoholism, drug abuse, powerlessness, dependency, low self-esteem, suicides, prostitution, gambling, homelessness, sexual abuse and violence" (p. 26).

In addition to the losses Aboriginal women suffered through enfranchisement and residential schools, LaRoque (2002) comments that the symbolic image of Aboriginal women as portrayed through school textbooks is demeaning, and contributes to their victimization in contemporary society. In a written presentation to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, she wrote about the consequences of these demeaning images on Aboriginal girls:

The portrayal of the squaw is one of the most degraded, most despised and most

dehumanized anywhere in the world. The 'squaw' is the female counterpart to the

Indian male 'savage' and as such she has no human face; she is lustful, immoral,

unfeeling and dirty. Such grotesque dehumanization has rendered all Native

women and girls vulnerable to gross physical, psychological and sexual violence.

(Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991, Chapter 13, Para. 28).

It is images such as these that provided the catalyst for a coalition of First Nation's girls

through the *Girlz Group* to be created. Through this project, we have all fiercely

contested these images because of the vulnerability they create in their lives.

A Violence Profile for First Nation's Women and Girls

Aboriginal women face discrimination both inside and outside of their

communities, which has contributed to their profound economic and social difficulties

and enhanced their vulnerability to violence (Baskin, 2003). The true extent of violence

faced by young Aboriginal women is impossible to calculate due to varying definitions of

what constitutes violence, the reality that many violent incidents go unreported

(particularly domestic violence), the absence of a provincial or national resource system

for compiling statistics, limitations in the way victimization data is collected and

recorded, and the fact that the racial background of victims is not noted in police crime

reporting (Bopp, Bopp, & Lane, 2003; Amnesty International, 2004).

Bearing these limitations in mind, Aboriginal women face consistently higher

rates of violence than the overall female population. Statistics Canada's General Social

Survey (GSS) taps into the respondent's exposure to family violence in the five years

prior to the administration of the survey. The following are some results of the 2004 GSS:

- Aboriginal respondents were victims of spousal violence at three times the rate of non-Aboriginal respondents (21% versus 7%). The Aboriginal respondents rates were 24% for females and 18% for men;

- A greater proportion of Aboriginal victims than non-Aboriginal victims stated that they feared for their life as a result of the violence (33% versus 22%).

- While 37% of non-Aboriginal women reported having experienced severe and potentially life threatening violence, including being beaten, choked, threatened with or having a gun or knife used against them or sexually assaulted, this figure increased to 54% for Aboriginal women;

- A larger proportion of Aboriginal people experienced emotional abuse from either a current partner or previous partner in the 5-year period relative to non-Aboriginal people (36% versus 17%).

- 19% of Aboriginal people reported experiencing some form of stalking in the previous five years which caused them to fear for their life versus 9% of non-Aboriginal people (Statistics Canada, 2005).

Previous studies carried out largely by Aboriginal researchers and organizations indicate much higher rates of abuse than those of Statistics Canada studies. For instance, the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba found that one in three Aboriginal women face abuse, while the Ontario Native Women's Association (1989) found that Aboriginal women are eight times more likely to suffer family violence than women in society at large (as cited in Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). NWAC found that 80%, or four out of five Aboriginal women, have witnessed or experienced intimate violence in their childhood

(as reported in Jacobs, 2002). The violence that Aboriginal women and children face has reached epidemic levels.

The response of the justice system to the violence faced by Aboriginal women is inadequate, and according to the Canadian Panel for Violence Against Women (CPVAW), the criminal justice system is failing Aboriginal women (1993). In their report to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, the Thompson Crisis Centre explained that this failure to assist Aboriginal women occurs at all levels of the criminal justice system (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). With respect to police involvement, the Crisis Centres' clients reported insensitivity on part of the police in responding to spousal abuse and failure of the police to respond to spousal abuse as if it were a serious crime; and long police response times. Further, in the legal system, victims of domestic violence faced an indifference and arrogance by legal professionals, humiliating questioning, difficulties obtaining peace bonds, and a lack of supports for victims throughout the legal process (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). These difficulties serve to amplify an already impossible situation as women struggle to escape the violence they face by partners.

These claims of second-rate service in the legal system are substantiated by the Indigenous Women's Collective who reported that many women are discouraged from going to the police for help based on their general lack of understanding of family violence, and a lack of sensitivity to abused women and the needs of their children (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). Unless women have the support of friends and family to turn to, they often suffer silently. To escape violence, many Aboriginal women have and continue to leave their reserves and migrate to urban centres in search of work and social

services. LaRoque (2002) explains that once there, they face personal, systemic, subtle and overt discrimination.

In 2004, Amnesty International released a landmark report highlighting the connection between the violence that Aboriginal women and girls in Canada face that places them in a position of enhanced vulnerability to harm and violence, and which violates their human rights. This study entailed a comprehensive review of published reports, inquests, government inquiries and interviews with families of nine missing and murdered Aboriginal women over the last three decades in Canada, and with violence survivors themselves.

Amnesty International's *Stolen Sister's* Report (2004) provides compelling evidence that the issue of violence against Aboriginal women and girls has not received sufficient recognition due to racism and societal indifference to their welfare and safety, and failure of the police to employ adequate standards of protection to Aboriginal women facing violence. The report also highlights, anecdotally, the high prevalence of the most extreme forms of violence faced by Aboriginal women and girls, with a particular focus on sex trade violence, and racist violence (Amnesty International, 2004, pp. 25-29).

Towards a Definition of Violence Based on Intersectionality

"Violence" and violent acts are conceptualised and researched from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives, such as sociology, psychology, criminology and legal studies. The ways that violence is portrayed, evaluated and responded to is affected by the definitions used (Burman, Batchelor, & Brown, 2001). In mainstream criminology research, violence has been primarily limited to public criminal acts of violence (Stanko, 1994), such as assault, robbery, and murder. This tendency to count or study violence as

singular acts or events fails to capture the process by which social conditions are linked to violence (Price, 2005). Legal definitions of violence against women are typically based on male views of what is harmful to women thereby neglecting the female experience of violence[8] (eg. Dworkin, 1981; Frye, 1983; Price, 1988, in Price, 2005, p. 14). As a result of these omissions, women's experiences of violence, particularly that of racialized women, are rendered virtually invisible in mainstream criminological research (See Chan & Mirchandani, 2002).

In a recent literature review concerning violence and girls, the Canadian-based Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence (AFRCV) concluded that the violence prevention literature generally employs a narrow definition of violence, limited to sexual and physical abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, and the witnessing of violence, and lacks a gender focus or understanding of systemic violence (AFRCV, 1999). For their Girl Child project, the AFRCV expanded the concept of violence to include psychological harms, and acknowledged the hierarchical nature of Canadian society and power imbalances which operate to sustain dominant-submissive social roles that perpetuate violence (Jiwani & Berman, 2002). Accordingly, the AFRCV defines violence as:

> The construction of difference and otherness; it entails inferiorizing or devaluing the 'Other.' Violence is further understood as the mechanism by which individuals' or groups vie for, and/or sustain a position of power in hierarchical structures defined by patriarchal values (Jiwani & Berman, 2002, p. 5).

Baskin (2003), in a chapter on family violence, attempts to carve out a definition that fits with a more holistic Aboriginal perspective on the issue. In her opinion, feminist definitions of violence against women, although inadequate, come closest because they

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[8] For instance, Canadian legal definitions of rape required full vaginal penetration until 1983 (Price, 2005).

extend definitions beyond physical acts, and account for individual *and* structural

violence. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) defines

violence as:

> a multifaceted problem which encompasses physical, sexual, psychological and
>
> economic violations of women and which is integrally linked to the social
>
> economic/political structures, values and policies that silence women in our
>
> society, support gender-based discrimination and maintain women's inequality (In
>
> Baskin, 2003, p. 217).

Baskin (2003) expands upon this definition by adding acts of domination based not only

on gender, as found in the violence against women literature, but also on race, and class,

explaining Aboriginal family violence as a consequence of colonization, forced

assimilation and cultural genocide (p. 217).

In the broadest terms, Health Canada (1996) defines violence as "any behaviour

that is diminishing, damaging, or destructive" to an individual (Health Canada, 1996,

Para. 3). This definition of violence, when applied to categories of social location, such as

race, and gender, create the power imbalances noted above by the AFRCV that enable the

operation of domination as discussed by Baskin (2003). Theorizing the link between

individual acts and interlocking structures of violence provides a method of hearing

stories of women situated at the intersections of gender, race, and class to understand how

structures of domination operate in their lives. Since the current study is exploratory, the

stories of the young women in this study are understood from this broad-based definition

of violence.

The vulnerability to violence the First Nation's Girl Child faces by virtue of her minority race, her female gender, her young age, and her marginalized position in Canada's social hierarchy is severe. This enhanced vulnerability fuels a need for research that places their experience of violence and discrimination in historical and political context, and considers how dynamic structures of oppression create dangerous environments. Some of the many factors related to the violence they face include policing practices, social and economic policies, land claims, and extremely harmful practices such as the assimilation of Aboriginal people through residential schools.

Research Context

The initial interest in this study stemmed from the growing body of literature directed at understanding the factors set out above that lead girls and women to commit violence, and how to best respond (See Moretti, Odgers, & Jackson, 2004). In general, the focus of research investigating the causes of violence of female youth has focused on individual-level factors, neglecting the influence of systemic processes such as racialization, gendering, colonization and economic inequality (Barron, 2000; Chan & Mirchandi, 2002). While much of the developing literature on this subject focuses on identifying the risk and protective factors associated with female delinquency and violence, my interest is directed toward understanding the social context in which girls are "at risk" of violence. Additionally, the project seeks to understand the strategies that young racialized women employ to survive in their physical and social worlds.

My research contributes to the continuing scholarship produced by the Girl Child Project, which examines violence prevention initiatives with respect to the Canadian Girl Child (Jiwani & Berman, 2002). The Girl Child Project demonstrated that various social

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policies, laws, and institutions in Canada contribute to and perpetuate the socialization of

violent experience in the lives of girls. Most important to the current research, the Girl

Child Project is one of few Canadian research efforts to explore the dynamics and

varieties of intersections of oppressions between systemic violence and domestic and

family violence. Based on principles of feminist theory and PAR, the Girl Child Project

first inventoried existing programs and services available to girls and young women and

reviewed the violence prevention literature. Following this, the various centres of the

Alliance conducted focus groups with service providers and young women across the

country, with each centre focusing on a different issue identified in the literature review,

from the sexual harassment and sexual exploitation of girls to the vulnerabilities of

immigrant and refugee girls and their access to services, violence prevention

programming and successful interventions for the girl child. The overall message of the

project noted "the necessity of reconceptualizing violence such that the dynamics of

inferiorization, 'otherness', and the resulting marginality are viewed as key risk factors

deserving of a heightened level of attention, intervention and commitment of resources"

(AFRCV, 1999, p. 174).

Noting the Girl Child Project finding that there is a "lack of information and

coordination among service providers around strategies for violence prevention and

intervention, and a severe lack of services designed specifically for girls," Janoviček

(2001) responded by conducting a series of roundtables and interviews with service

providers working with girls from marginalized communities which is particularly

instructive to this thesis (p. 1). Her approach sought to uncover the "unique

vulnerabilities arising from the intersection of age and gender, and systemic

vulnerabilities created by colonization, racism, ableism, homophobia, and poverty" (p.1).

Janoviček's (2001) research addressed a significant gap in the feminist research

literature by further investigating experiences of racialized girls, and Aboriginal girls.

Janoviček (2001) pulls out the commonalities and differences between the groups,

indicates possible points of intervention, and documents the service providers'

recommendations for change. The commonalities of the discussions revealed that service

providers felt violence is normalized and pervasive in the lives of marginalized girls, and

occurs across all contexts of their lives, including institutional contexts such as in the

criminal justice (see also Dell, 2002) and health systems (see also Health Canada, 1996).

In addition to the noted lack of services available to suit the needs of marginalized girls,

service providers were frustrated that services available do not address the oppression

that creates vulnerability for the Girl Child, and leaves her few other choices but to fight

the power that institutions exert over her life, using coping mechanisms such as:

responding violently, internalising racism, running away and self-harm (Janoviček,

2001).

The experiences unique to the Aboriginal service provider groups construct the

situation Aboriginal girls face as terribly difficult (Janoviček, 2001). For instance, their

families are impacted by extensive inter-generational abuse connected back to residential

schools. Canadian institutions have failed to address the systemic causes of poverty,

which places a lot of Aboriginal families at higher risk for violence due to their relatively

low socio-economic status. The service providers themselves noted the difficulties they

faced in attempting to expose abuses in Aboriginal families, and their frustration with

generally held societal views of Aboriginal girls as sexually available, and not worthy of respect (Janoviček, 2001).

From the Girl Child Project, I have borrowed from their concept of violence operating on a continuum from individual realities to systemic institutional structures, as discussed previously. Further, the service provider study made some general recommendations that have been incorporated into the current research, such as involving the input of girls in evaluating programs for youth, creating safe spaces to talk their experiences of oppressive processes such as sexism, racism, ableism, poverty, and homophobia; and, incorporating theories of intersectionality to create programs that address the vulnerabilities that girls face (Janoviček, 2001). In the next chapter, I explain the methods I have used to implement my thesis project.

CHAPTER THREE:
METHODS

"What an awesome thought. It's so great! Someone had a good thought
for our First Nation's girls of the [inner-city neighbourhood],
that maybe we can have a place to gather and share our thoughts with each other,
break bread, get paid, and maybe, just maybe, make a difference with our youth.
Our new and upcoming youth will know how to deal with violence better
than the days before, and maybe we can help those who have been affected
by violence if it is not too late. So our hands are raised to all who made this
group possible (Girlz Group participant, Age 16).

This thesis project has developed as part of a larger community-university partnership responding to the social development challenges faced by a group of First Nation's girls growing up in an impoverished inner-city community. I employed a framework of PAR as a starting point to create an environment suited for collaboration, commitment to a cause of addressing violence against women, and collective inquiry and action in the community context. Through the creation of the *Girlz Group*, this praxis project employed multiple methods of social science inquiry as this collaboration moved from a broad-based concern of violence faced by Aboriginal girls towards the currently developing stages of a mentoring project in this community to support the safe and healthy development of future generations of Aboriginal girls. In the quote above, one of the young female participants of this project provides feedback on her views of this model – the feedback of the girls was constantly encouraged to inform the development and revision of the model throughout the process of the research. Together, our *Girlz Group* has represented an intersection of social science research knowledge, experiential realities, and a solid understanding of issues faced by youth in this urban environment.

Gaining Entry to the Field and the Participant Group

In 2003, my thesis supervisors and myself were invited to take part in a research partnership by the community schools coordinator and his staff at an inner city school (named previously). Prior to launching this study, I participated in several meetings with community youth workers and my supervisors to gain a shared understanding of the issues facing the targeted inner-city community, to establish a relationship of trust with the community partners of the research, and a shared commitment to working *with*, and *for* the targeted participant group. With a solid research partnership in hand, and the agreement of the community school to provide a meeting space and stationary supplies, I organized funding to engage participants in on-going research concerning their everyday experiences of discrimination and violence growing up as Aboriginal girls in the urban inner city[9]. The project was submitted to the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University for ethical approval.

The community school's coordinator and the youth workers of this project had prior relationships with female participants who struggle daily with harassment, racism, and growing up in a high poverty community. In their years of work in the community, they had noticed a rise in interest to the violence committed by the young girls in their neighbourhood. Specifically, they vented concerns that media stories focused on behavioural deficits of "violent girls," overshadowing the importance of sociocultural factors affecting the participation of marginalized girls in community violence, and systemic injustices such as sexism, racism, and poverty. The community partners invited

the participation of my supervisors and myself to commit to a strengths-based research framework to raise consciousness about systemic causes of this community violence, and to provide marginalized girls with a safe place to speak about the violence they face, and make suggestions for violence prevention programming. The community partners felt that a collaborative project would empower the young marginalized women to rise above the structural barriers to their personal health and well being, and dispute stereotypes that contribute to their marginalization.

The strength of the relationships of the youth workers to the girls of this project had enormous value to my project. For instance, one of the two youth workers lives in the neighbourhood of the girls of this group, and has been closely involved in the lives of many of the girls' as they have grown up, while the other youth worker has been active on the frontlines in the quarters surrounding our research site for several years as a film, acting, and community programs coordinator. The youth workers and I have been involved with the girls not only as facilitators of the group, but also as friends, family, confidantes, advocates, and motivators. The youth workers were highly respected in the neighbourhood prior to the studies initiating, thereby holding status as 'insiders' within the community of interest, and in the lives of the participants themselves. I was first taken as a suspected outsider and potential informant for Government and policing organizations, but with time, and through conversation, I became accepted as one of the family, and welcomed warmly into the lives of the girls and those of their families.

Through strategically placed posters and word-of-mouth communications, teenage girls from the neighbourhood around the community school were invited by the youth workers and me to attend information sessions. The girls were asked to indicate what

challenges to daily life they face that they are most concerned about, including the role that violence played in the community context. Twenty-two of the original 25 youth from the information sessions elected to join the research team – admittedly, this number is much higher than ideal for participatory research, but speaks volumes to the commitment of the girls to the goals of this project. Twenty of these 22 girls were of Aboriginal ancestry, and at the end of my involvement in the group two years later, the remaining 15 girls were all Aboriginal. The girls ranged in age from 12 to 18 at the start of my project, and at its completion were 14 to 20.

The *Girlz Group* Model

Once the commitment of the girls was secured, the youth workers and I co-facilitated six two-hour sessions over the period of six weeks to provide sufficient time for relationships to develop and to create an environment where participants are honoured as co-inquirers in the research process. The aim was to develop a meeting structure that would work for the young participants, and, and allow them to feel free to be themselves. Through feedback with the girls, we developed a meeting structure that worked for the young participants - Regular two-hour weekly meetings starting with snacks, and followed by a meal with child-care provided for the teen mothers in the group. The girls established guidelines for the maintenance of a safe space and group process.

From this time on, future meetings were structured around an agenda created in consultation with the girls through discussions and priorities generated from previous group discussions. This process allowed for my research to develop through small cycles of problem definition, group discussion, and follow-up analysis, a rigorous and iterative process that adds ecological validity to the research. Following a brief time for snacks at

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the start of each weekly meeting, the agenda was launched starting with a circle process.

In the words of one of our young participants, *"Group starts at five and then everybody sits in a circle and has a check-in about how they feel and how their day and weekend went"* (Little Star, Age 21[10], Trailblazers Video, 2005[11]). This check-in circle was crucial to centre the groups' activities to the tasks at hand and to provide each girl with a chance to share suggestions or concerns about group process. Our circle adopted the cultural practices of smudging and prayer often led by a girl in our group that helped cement a feeling of personal connection between group members. *"Then we go into whatever is planned for the day...By the end of the day, we close up and we make sure that we have got everything covered, and then we go eat. And oh, then we get an honorarium too"* (Little Star, Age 21, Trailblazers Video, 2005).

Although the provision of incentives for research participation is a disputed procedure due to the potential for coercion, I have reasoned that it is completely appropriate to compensate participants for their involvement in the process through weekly honorariums of $10.00, and the provision of food, child-care and transportation to weekly meetings. The project was constructed to co-create knowledge, and the youth committed themselves to an intense, on-going process (currently two years). It would be unfair to expect these girls to give up their time weekly without some form of compensation. In order to symbolically honour the girls as experts of their experiences, and to include them as co-inquirers, it was felt that not paying them would be exploitive, and would promote the development of unequal relationships between the researchers

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[10] Due to the two year data collection period of this project, the age of participants noted changes throughout this paper to reflect their age at the time of the statement.
[11] A video was developed by *Girlz Group* facilitators and the girls themselves to document the process of *Girlz Group* in 2005. For more information on this video, contact Dr. Margaret Jackson, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University.

and participants. Furthermore, disposable money for childcare, food and transportation is rare for these girls and thus, my project had to be responsive to the daily realities of these girls' lives in order to make research and the knowledge making process accessible to the participants. This model of research was gender specific and culturally relevant, allowing the research project to proceed in a manner that was responsive to the reality of their lives, and the overlapping intersections of their membership in the margins of gender, race and class.

Research Methods

The *Girlz Group* project was carried out in the community to work towards understanding and ending violence in the inner city community of the young participants. My specific thesis project drew on discussions created towards that purpose, and my follow-up questions, interviews, and casual conversations to create the intersectional narrative provided herein. Given the exploratory nature of the *Girlz Group* project, and this study, multiple methods of personal interaction with the girls were deemed appropriate. The decisions that were made to carry out this project are documented below. The approach chosen involves an ongoing investigation into the realities of the lives of the participants *in* their community context.

Sampling Approach

Decisions about sampling and selection of who or what will serve as the data for any study should be informed by theoretical and empirical considerations of the broad "universe" one will draw from (Mason, 2002). Through her intersectional framework, Collins (1998) suggests a social location may serve as a site for sampling. Following this

advice, I employed a purposive sample as participants were chosen based on a) their social location of female gender, minority race, and lower class, and b) their relevant experience with violence (as determined by the youth workers). The goal of this sampling method is to make meaning of rich and detailed data of a shared experience of violence and victimization as constructed by the persons being studied (Cuádrez & Uttal, 1999). Although a purposive sampling approach does not allow the researcher to make claims of representational or generalizable findings (Berg, 2004), the approach has allowed the collection of rich and nuanced accounts of the participants' lived experience.

Another key determination of sampling is deciding how many participants to include (Mason, 2002). This decision involves closely considering how many participants would be enough to address the research question in a focused way. A large sample size is not necessary to uncover meanings in a qualitative approach. Indeed, "it is the quality of the analysis and the extent to which we uncover meanings and processes germane to the qualitative endeavor, not the size of the sample or the presence of comparative categories, that produces theoretically relevant issues and explanations" (Cuádrez & Uttal, 1999, p. 166).

Due to the purposive sampling approach of this project, the question is whether a sample will provide access to "enough data" to address the research question (Mason, 2002). A pre-determination of exactly who and "how many" would be enough is not always possible in a qualitative approach because the decisions about what one may need to compare and the extent to which the sample chosen can achieve that, will not be clear until the study is underway as the sampling design is emergent (Mason, 2002). Thus, beyond the initial group discussions, the decision about "who else" and "how many

more" interviews to conduct emerged from a) a theoretical vantage point - considering what information is necessary to illustrate the intersectionality of oppressions in young women's experiences with violence and resultant survival strategies; and b) a practical vantage point – including a consideration of time and budget restrictions.

The Process of Data Collection

Using a feminist and PAR framework, I invited the girls of *Girlz Group* to define violence on their own terms, and participate in the development of focus groups and interviews, as well as an *Inner City Youth Needs and Resources Survey.*[12] The focus groups and survey were used to draw out the girls' everyday experiences in a conversational way for further analysis. This collaborative exercise took place through ongoing interaction with the participants in our weekly meetings over the course of eighteen months, involving an iterative and incremental process of problem definition, data collection, interpretation, and presentation of group results at conference meetings and community events. Following this larger collaborative cycle involving the full *Girlz Group*, a few girls who were most comfortable sharing in-depth details of their experiences elected to co-analyse the meaning of the problems identified from the first cycle through individual interviews and a smaller final feedback focus group. This process allowed a second cycle of data analysis, and helped to ensure the validity of my interpretation of *Girlz Group* experiences. Below, I provide detailed reasoning about the methods I have used in this process beginning with focus groups.

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[12] See Appendix A to view the survey.

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Focus Groups

Focus groups are a common method used in social science research (Janesick, 2004), valued as both a single method, and as a supplemental approach for both qualitative and quantitative studies (Janesick, 2004). Focus groups provide a method of gathering information about a pre-determined topic through interaction moderated by a trained facilitator in a group setting (Morgan, 1988, cited in Janesick, 2004). In social research, focus groups have many purposes, from "orienting oneself to a new field," to generating hypotheses, gaining feedback from participants, and learning the language and culture of the target group (Janesick, 2004). Focus groups have been integrated into the research practices of scholars from many disciplines (eg. sociology, criminology, education, and political science).

A key strength of focus groups is that they can provide the researchers with insights into "the sources of complex behaviours and motivations" (Morgan, 1988, in Janesick, 2004, p. 272), a level of information that is not easily investigated without group interaction (Janesick, 2004). Further, due to the interaction of participants within group discussions, the dialogue generated can offer insights into the consensus and diversity of views (Morgan & Krueger, 1993, cited in Janesick, 2004).

A second key strength of focus groups to the current project is that they may provide the researcher with a preliminary glimpse into the social meanings, processes, and norms of the sample of interest and their definitions of the subject matter (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). For instance, focus groups are valuable tools for generating contextual information such as illustrative stories, and everyday group language (p. 9). Furthermore, Janesick (2004) cites evidence that focus groups are reportedly suited to "giving voice" to marginalized groups (Joseph et al., 1984),

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empowering clients (Magill, 1993, Race et al., 1994) and as a tool in action and participatory research (See Joseph et al., 1984, Magill, 1993; Race et al., 1994; and Hugentobler et al., 1992, cited in Janesick, 2004).

The value of focus groups in participatory research has also been noted (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001) and their relevant participatory value to my thesis project is four-fold. First, focus groups provide a forum for the democratic participation of lay persons in the development of knowledge; second, focus groups support the active construction of a point of view; third, focus groups can serve as a starting point for transformative action, and fourth, they serve as a venue through which lay persons can be invited into the design, conduct, and analysis of research findings (p. 93).

Focus groups, however, are not without their drawbacks. The knowledge shared through the use of focus groups is mediated-text, and where the subject matter is sensitive, the likelihood of underreporting and withheld viewpoints is likely (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001). As a lone method, focus groups provide a snapshot of broad viewpoints and the range of experiences of the participants.

To address this shortcoming, I have used multiple methods to triangulate the information shared. This triangulation of method allows a richer and more reliable look at the subject from different angles. Focus groups were used to guide discussions and observations in the group through an iterative process of problem definition, analysis, and follow-up feedback. Each focus group represents its own cycle of research. The questions for each focus group were pre-determined following information generated

from previous group discussions so that emergent themes could be acted on in subsequent discussion[13].

Interviewing

This project sought to encourage the creation of deep and rich narratives that represent the experiences of several of the participants in their own voices and highlight the intersectionality of multiple oppressions young women of colour face in their daily lives. Cuádrez & Uttal (1999) suggest that interviewing is a natural fit in an intersectional approach as it "allows the subjects to represent their experiences in their own voices" (p. 160).

Interviewing is accepted as the most widely used method of systematic social inquiry (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 3). An overarching way to define their use in social inquiry is as "special conversations," varying from highly structured conversations, to "free-flowing" dialogues (p. 3). Traditionally, researchers have used interviews in a fairly one-sided conversational manner to extract objective information from passive respondents "interrogation-style" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 3). However, interview conversation has been revolutionized in recent times to be valued and recognized as a communicative activity where interviewer and subject jointly construct meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 35). For the purposes of this project, I adopt Mishler's (1986) conceptualisation of the active interview as discourse between speakers:

> The discourse of the interview is jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent.... Both questions and responses are formulated in, developed through, and shaped by the discourse between interviewers and respondents....

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[13] See Appendix B to view probing-questions used in focus groups.

An adequate understanding of interviews depends on recognizing how interviewers reformulate questions and how respondents frame answers in terms of their reciprocal understanding as meanings emerge during the course of an interview (p. 52, as cited in Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 35).

Through a process of observation of issues emerging through focus group discussions, casual conversations, and my personal reflections on group process, I developed an unstructured interview guide for follow-up and further questioning to explore in-depth the survival strategies arising from the intersections of different forms of injustices. This multiple method allowed me to assess the consistency and the counter-patterns of the same sets of questions through differing approaches and to weave in additional layers of information to the group narrative. In the next chapter, I provide an intersectional narrative of the results of the focus group and interview processes to document the real-life challenges that young First Nation's women from the *Girlz Group* face and the survival strategies they employ to live out their lives.

CHAPTER 4:
DATA ANALYSIS

Our women's drum group is so cool.
It is not very common because girls are not traditionally
allowed at the drum, and with our drum group, we are like
starting something new, and people look at us and they are
like WOW, looks at those girls go, they are good!
It is just an awesome feeling, and it's empowering.
(Raven, Age 19, Final Feedback Focus Group)

In this chapter, I present the data for this project as developed from the everyday

experiences of the *Girlz Group* participants through a bricolage of methods employed in

this project. The data are presented in narrative form, weaving together the key themes

of violence and discrimination experiences as discussed through focus group discussions,

interviews, and casual conversations. A group narrative is valued in this project because

it provides a method to tell a story that is constructed by a group of people through

multiple forms of interaction, including group discussion, textual analysis, and creative

expression (Rappaport, 1995).

I have adopted a PAR strategy to first allow the girls' voices and issues to emerge

from the data. My intersectional framework guides the writing of the narrative to locate

the narratives within their individual and social contexts. Through this process, I have

taken care to privilege the voices of my participants because the theory should not be

used to shape responses (Cuádrez & Uttal, 1999). The young participants have been

continuously encouraged to represent their experiences from their own standpoints.

To begin the narrative, I document the everyday experiences of violence as captured through the Girlz Group's first newsletter, followed by three key focus group discussions, entitled: 1) violence prevention and girls; 2) improving youth and police relationships in the community; and 3) inner city life. This narrative is further informed by the analysis of the *Inner City Youth Needs and Resources Survey,*[14] and casual conversations and observations I made through each cycle of this process.

A fourth and final focus group and a few follow-up interviews and casual conversations were developed to allow for the young participants to acts as consultants in interpreting results from the previous sources and discuss their experiences and perspectives that related to or varied from the findings. Girls who were most comfortable sharing in more detail some of the very sensitive experiences framed by the group narrative were invited to participate in this focus group – there were five participants in this group. This process provided a concrete way to co-analyse findings, to connect participants' more detailed individual experiences to the group narrative, and to reflect on such experiences through the application of intersectionality.

These everyday experiences as collected through these follow-up methods are weaved into the group narrative below to contribute to the dialect and provide concrete examples of confirming and conflicting perspectives. To distinguish the voices from the first cycle of focus groups and survey from this second cycle of interviews and feedback focus group, I have used participant numbers for the quotes of the former, and pseudonyms for the quotes of the latter. Long quotes from individual voices that highlight the girls' feeling of vulnerability to violence and discrimination, as well as the

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[14] This survey was developed in 2004 through consultation with the *Girlz Group*, and administered to similarly located youths at an Open House Barbecue that the *Girlz Group* organized and hosted. This survey will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

coping, resisting and survival strategies they have learned in response will further complement this narrative.

The intersectional analysis is incorporated into the group narrative and the final focus group results using an intersectional framework based on narrative theory adapted from Philomena Essed (2003)[15]. This intersectional narrative is constructed to illustrate everyday discriminations through a) first explaining the "*context*" of the situation (the who, what, when, where, and why of *Girlz Group*); b) describing the "*challenges*," that is, the unacceptable experiences of violence and discrimination experienced by the girls as discussed through focus groups and the survey; c) followed by an "*explanation*" of what kinds of processes were at play through the girls' feedback in the final focus groups and interviews; and finally, d) "analysis," namely my individual analysis of how intersecting oppressions operate by considering situational, contextual, and societal cues (Essed, 2003).

Girlz Group **Narrative**

The Context

Most of the girls in this group live within a few blocks of the inner city community school where the project takes place.[16] The girls on this project persist in poverty, living in crowded housing conditions, or without a home. Throughout different stages of this project, several of the girls have dropped out of high school, while some have re-enrolled. A few of the girls hold employment in the community, some still live

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[15] The original method was a case study approach to examine the characteristics of systemic everyday racism. Essed (2003) explains that the method can assist lay people to prepare for eventual legal action if applied carefully.
[16] The name and location of this school and community have been excluded in my discussion to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

with their mothers, and some live on income assistance. Several of the girls in the group have children of their own.

The community context of this urban centre can be described as highly toxic, with visible drug and alcohol use and abuse on the streets. The street on which our project takes place is often referred to as "kiddie stroll" as it is known for its young prostitutes who are brought into the sex trade as young as ten years of age. The conditions these girls and their families survive in daily are difficult, and often dangerous.

The girls of this group come from a variety of Aboriginal backgrounds, with many nations represented in the group, including: Musqueam, Cree, Blackfoot, Coast Salish, Nisga'a, Gitsxan, Heiltsuk, Kwaguilth, Mi'kmaq and Klahoose. Furthermore, many of the girls in the group have family members of European origin within their family trees, if not directly in a parent. Countless roles and skills are represented in the group, which in one *Girlz Group* presentation included: *poets, authors, artists, leaders, activists, musicians, comedians, photographers, drummers, dancers, athletes, survivors, mentors, mothers, sisters, aunties, cousins, etc* (*Girlz Group* Presentation, National Inner City Education Conference, Vancouver, B.C., February, 2005).

Once a commitment to group process was secured from the girls, our discussions became centered on what the girls found most problematic and worrisome to their feelings of safety and well being in their communities. The girls of the group valued their connection to each other as women, as life givers, and as sources of information and social support in times of need. The *Girlz Group* provided a safe environment for them to speak only about their experiences of violence and discrimination.

Many forms of violence were identified as problematic to the girls. Through ongoing dialogue, moving from general to more specific discussions, the group facilitators including myself, and the young participants of the group, interacted as co-investigators with the girls, working to define the problem of violence from their own experiences, the purpose of the group as they envision it, and the structure of our collaboration. This helped to cement the girls' feelings of ownership over the group process, and the importance of their voice in designing and implementing this praxis approach.

The first newsletter produced by the girls listed what the *Girlz Group* is about in their own words:

- *To help younger girls make different choices;*

- *To keep girls off the streets and out of trouble;*

- *Stopping violence, and drug abuse in the community;*

- *A safe place for girls to have a voice;*

- *Talking about the stuff in the news;*

- *Putting up a community service;*

- *To find out why girls fight;*

- *Leaning how to make things better;*

- *To build a stronger, better community for the younger female, and youth of the future. (Girlz Group Newsletter, July 2004, p.1).*

The Challenges

The discussions in our initial group meetings centered on a question of what would help young women, such as themselves, negotiate the daily challenges they face in

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the community. The dominant concerns of the girls had to do with the violence they face

on the streets, feeling that the community that they are growing up in is a dangerous place

that you have to learn to survive in. As the above comments note, the girls wanted the

focus of the group to be about how the situation could be improved, and how young

women could be better supported to promote their safety rather than focusing on the

deficits of their environment. This process of group formation, problem definition and

goal-setting directed me to develop a focus group discussion about what kinds of

community supports would be helpful in the prevention of violence against girls.

Focus Group I: "Violence Prevention and Girls"

Questions about the girls' definition of violence and when it occurs opened the

discussion. A whole range of violent acts were identified from relatively minor acts, such

as vandalism, spitting and pinching, to more damaging acts such as sexual assault, rape,

and murder. The participation in the discussion was high as thy girls took turns

explaining their lingo to describe certain kinds of violence. For instance, a "sissy test" *is*

when you let someone beat on your forearm for like twenty minutes " (Participant 2) or

can also be "*when you and another person hold a burning cigarette between your*

forearms, and see who sissies' out first " (Participant 1).

Generally, the girls talked about violence as akin to legal definitions of abuse,

including verbal, sexual, physical, and mental abuse, as well as neglect. Further, it was

explained that different kinds of abuse affects all the different parts of one's self-identity.

Understood from the holistic perspective of the medicine wheel, it was explained,

"*There's the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual* [parts of the medicine wheel],

spiritual abuse, it's like an attack on our traditions and cultures – like when we weren't

allowed to have potlatches and stuff" (Participant 7). The girls further identified acts that in recent literature are defined as relational violence, such as *"exclusion, insults, bullying and name-calling"* (Participants 13 & 14). Finally, some girls felt that *"racism"* and *"sexism"* were forms of violence in their experience (Participants 18 & 12), and thus our collaborative definition of violence tapped into individual acts between people, as well as more systemic forms of violence.

The Challenges

When asked about when and how violence against women occurs, the intensity of conversation picked up, as girls turned the discussion towards violence in dating relationships. They felt that no woman should stay in a relationship involving violence. The girls agreed that men usually perpetrated violence against girls, but not always. To prevent violence against women, one girl suggested *"we need skills to lift our confidence and independence so we wouldn't have to rely on guys to survive"* (Participant 4). The rest of the participants explicitly expressed this same view. The girls felt that it is very important for women to stand up for themselves and protect themselves and their children from violence. It was explained that violence in relationships occurs in cycles, and that women play a key role in breaking that cycle because, *"compared to boys, we have a larger role in raising children."* The girls did not begrudge this role as "their duty" but rather; they celebrated their position as *"the ones who keep the world going"* (Participant 9).

Girls named other barriers to getting the help they needed, such as lack of transportation, lack of knowledge of what is available, the limited hours of the services available, and the difficulties of developing trusting relationships due to high staff turn-

over rates at the services they access. Despite a number of barriers, the girls felt there were several places they could try for help when in need, such as telephone hotlines, school counsellors and native liaisons; health-related services such as family doctors, detoxification centres, safe injection sites, and treatment clinics. Several women-specific services were also identified including a mother centre and safe houses. Other types of social services named were social workers, counselling and support groups and Elder advice. Community resources such as neighbourhood houses, drop-in centres, and a youth resource centre were valued for offering resources and information, food, day care, and clothing.

The girls were proud to be women, and felt that girls have certain personal strengths and qualities that will help protect them against violence. For instance, the full list of strengths discussed include: A commitment to their native culture; loyalty to community and their emotional connections; their commitment to family, involvement in activities such as singing and dancing, arts and crafts, and by listening to each other, story-telling, and promoting open communication (Haley, 2005).

In reflecting on the information collected, many of the girls felt that this discussion was informative, as just through the process of talking about community resources, they became aware of what the community has to offer, and learned about resources they previously had not known about. As such, the process of discussion itself was informative, an effect common in a successfully implemented PAR project. While most of the girls indicated they felt they could benefit from most of the services discussed, only a few had actively sought out these services. The most valued support for

youth in our group and most broadly accessed were youth resource centres, and a native youth drop-in centre.

When asked about what would prevent girls from seeking out needed services, a clear answer and consensus could not be achieved. The girls brainstormed several reasons for this, such as waitlists, difficulties keeping appointments, not having bus fare, not knowing what was available, and fear of asking for the help needed. Others indicated that the services they accessed were not responsive to the context of their daily lives. For instance, half of the focus group participants raised concerns about the hours of operation being limited to Monday through Friday, nine to five o'clock, times when they are generally in school. Furthermore, staff changes at counselling services for women were very difficult for two of the girls in the group, as it is difficult to build up enough trust with a counsellor and open up about violence suffered only to have the relationship end. These girls explain that they became accustomed to staff turnovers.

Explanation

Through the above focus group, the challenges that were noted related to violence in dating relationships, the cyclical operation of violence, women's strengths in responding to violence, and barriers preventing girls from accessing needed services. Through the follow-up feedback interview discussed below, girls were asked to reflect on these themes, and share in more depth the manner in which these issues have played out in their daily realities.

Winona (Age 18), chose to comment on women's vulnerability to violence, explaining, "*guys think that if just cause a lady is smaller then they can overpower them or something,*" and when you are living with them, she explained, "*you depend on them.*"

Winona faced domestic abuse from her live-in partner at the age of 16, but after having a daughter, she realized she would have to leave the relationship to protect her daughter from the cycle of violence. *"I realized I needed to protect my daughter, that's what it took for me* [to leave]."

Agreeing with this statement, Little Star (Age 20) explained a similar experience of partner violence. At the age of 16, she ran away from her mother's home and found herself perpetually homeless, staying wherever she could, sleeping on the floor, and on couches at the homes of friends and boyfriends. She explained that this contributed to her vulnerability to violence:

I was so vulnerable and relied on a guy to help take care of me because that's where I lived. I mean like, I stayed with this guy for a year and a half. It was so bad there, this one time, he choked me out and threw me around the room and screwed up my back and neck and gave me a black eye...I kept staying with him and staying with him because I didn't know where to go.

The violence Little Star faced in living arrangements was not limited to this one boyfriend.

I always relied on a guy to take care of me or like even if I just stayed at a guy's place for awhile, it was just SO bad. It took me four years to get out of violence and like abusive relationships. It just, it went to the far extreme, I was over powered cause I was smaller and the guys were so much bigger.

All five of the girls at this smaller focus group agreed that dependence on men was a constant challenge for women in general, which they related to their financial dependence and *"needing a home."* Raven (Age 19) linked the modern-day dependence

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of First Nation's women back to the loss of power women suffered through the changing roles of men and women imposed through colonization. She explains:

These days we are dependent on men as providers. Like to take care of us, to put a roof over our head or something like that. And the way it was a long time ago as native peoples, women were higher [in the social hierarchy] *because they were the life givers and like men were the hunter-gatherers. They hunted the food and brought it back to us and put a roof over our heads, but the way it was then, men were grateful for the life givers because without us there wouldn't be life. We kinda lost that respect and it seems like men are now using that power of being providers.*

Despite their loss of power, the girls of the final focus group agreed that women have special strengths, and agreed with the strengths identified in the cycle one focus groups. In particular, they felt their commitment to their native culture is what helps them face the challenges they face in daily life. Speaking to this, several girls in the group shared the strength they find by participating in cultural practices that they are relearning by seeking teachings from their elders, and attending cultural events at the local friendship centre and Aboriginal drop-in centre.

In an individual interview, Peta (Age 16) explained how she felt about it: *"Our language, our stories, our sweats, our powwows, our potlatches, our ceremonies, they are good for us, they heal us."* Peta participates in a drum group for young Aboriginal women, along with three of the other feedback focus group participants. This girls' drum group involves 6-8 teenage girls who sit around a large powwow drum, and drum and sing together the songs they have learned through cultural teachings. Their involvement

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in traditional drumming is controversial because even in modern day practices, women are taught that only men are supposed to drum. Raven and the other girls objected to their exclusion from this practice, appealing to the symbolism of the drum. Raven explained that drum symbolizes a woman's heart beat, "*cause like as a child in the womb, the first sounds you hear is the heart beat, and the drum symbolizes life, and women giving life.*"

The healing power of the drum was emphasized several times through the course of the discussion. Little Star clarified "*when you are drumming that beat, and singing from your heart, you feel really good inside and letting it out through your voice, it's really empowering and healing too.*" Raven held she also feels empowered by drumming, not just as a person, or as a woman, but holistically as an Aboriginal woman, because "*it is not very common for girls to be allowed to sit at the drum, and with us, we are like starting something new, and people look at us and they are like WOW, look at those girls go, they are good, and uh, I don't know, it's kind of empowering to Aboriginal women because it's something we are not commonly able to do.*"

Leotie (Age 18) agreed that the drum has the same healing power for her, and also valued sweat ceremonies:

> *Sweats are good because you feel so much better after because that burden is lifted off your shoulders and while you are at the sweat, you are praying and you are asking for strength, and it is something I like to do when I am having a really hard time coping.*

Focus Group II: Inner City Life

In this focus group, the girls were asked to advise on what it is like to grow up in their urban inner-city neighbourhood as a First Nation's woman. One girl stated, *"It's pretty good, there's just so many perverts and I just don't like all the perverts"* (Participant 4). Another agreed and related a similar personal experience:

"Growing up in the city as a First Nation's woman there is a lot of racism towards First Nation's people. Like in the community base – working and volunteering, it's all great, but like being out here [on the street] *– there is a lot of perverts [who will] ...drive by and try to pick you up...I don't trust them. Yeah, the problems are racism and pervert"* (Participant 6).

Another girl was positive about growing up in the neighbourhood, commenting, *"it's alright...cuz you know you have your rough times it's all experience and you learn from your mistakes"* (Participant 8). Generally, the youth were proud of their neighbourhood and the relationships they have developed with people in it. *"Everybody around you can kind of relate to because you all live in the same place and you have similar issues"* (Participant 3), *"you know everyone"* (Participant 2) and *"can learn from your friends"* (Participant 4). Friendship support was highly valued for the difficult challenges youth in this neighbourhood face, and they appreciated that they had friends they could help out, and learn from each other's mistakes. In the girl's perspectives, the relationships they have developed provide them with knowledge to survive, and learn from. All eight girls in this focus group agreed that these relationships were one important and defining quality about their inner city neighbourhood, and valued the sense of support they feel due to the strong sense of community and camaraderie in the area.

The Challenges

When asked what they find frustrating or worrisome about living in the area, the girls spoke about the "*cops.*" "*It's frustrating 'cause they always pull you over and harass you and there's always SO MANY* (Participant 1)." The full list of consensus worrisome issues discussed were:

- *Racism, in the schools and in the community*

- *The cops;*

- *The perverts;*

- *Fighting amongst friends and family;*

- *Nothing to do, nowhere to go;*

- *Turf wars* [geographical, between youth of different cultural groups].

Explanation:

The final feedback group reviewed the transcript results of this focus group, and chose to comment on two issues they felt were particularly difficult, and which they experienced as violent experiences growing up in their neighbourhood: Racism and "*the perverts.* With respect to racism, Little Star and Raven told detailed stories of racism experienced in the school context that provide insight into how racism operated as both a cause and result of violence in their lives. Their stories serve as exemplars for the making of meaning of the experiences.

Little Star first encountered racism when she migrated to the inner city from a small reservation community at the age of 8. When asked to describe this racism, she stated:

It sucks, everyone looks at you differently, like they are better than you and that

you are dirty, or a drunk, or assume you are a thief just because you do not look

rich, or you're brown skin, or ghetto, right...People look down at "Indians."

In the classroom environment, she recalls being treated as intellectually slow, singled out

and excluded from group classroom activities, teased by children because of her

appearance (glasses, short hair, and second hand clothing) and publicly berated by

teachers when she did not understand class assignments. During her elementary school

years, she simply coped with the mistreatment on her own, feeling humiliated and

unworthy of respect and fair treatment. But, as the years went on, and the mistreatment

continued, she began to resist, and react against the insults, turning to violence.

We were working in groups on projects in a social studies class, and she [the

intelligent white girl] *asked everyone in our group what mark they got on a test,*

and they all got good grades, and she asked me what I got. I said I got C-, and

one of the other girls made some racial remarks towards me and made me feel

soooo small, and the teacher was walking around and knew what was going on

and didn't say anything to stop them.

The incident made her so angry that she decided the girl who insulted her was going to

pay for what she did. Confronting her at her locker, she demanded an apology, and when

she did not get an apology:

...she got her ass kicked, and like it was so funny because there was a big crowd

who laughed at her.

Although she felt empowered to get her revenge in this instance, she continued to feel

"ugly" and "dumb" among her peers, which led her to drop out of school.

I got mistreated so much in school. I don't know if it was because I had short

hair, or, uh, if it was cause I was native, or, my clothes, or that I had glasses. That

[mistreatment] *is one of the main reasons why I dropped out; I have dropped out*

five different times.

Little Star could not escape the mistreatment, no matter how hard she tried. She further explained that the teachers' neglect to protect her from racial insults cast at her by classmates made her feel unimportant and angered her. Little Star struggled with the messages about her value as a person through her treatment by peers and the lack of concern expressed by teachers. She could not separate the mistreatment she felt from her identity as a native person.

A second young woman, Raven, faced similar challenges in school. Raven has always attended school in the inner city and has always enjoyed learning. She has been self-driven in her education from elementary into high school. For the most part, her attendance and marks were always good until she reached grade eight or nine at age 13, at which time, she explains, "*I was hanging out with friends, and starting to get into*

drinking and partying. I failed grade nine twice at [Name of high school] cause I wasn't

going. " It was about this time that Raven was convicted with theft under $5,000 and was placed on probation. "*We all got probation and restrictions against each other, but I kept*

breaching, so I kept having to do two weeks" [in juvenile prison].

Raven ran into challenges trying to remain in the mainstream education system after an assault conviction in 2002 at the age of 15.

I was at a party and I got into a fight with a girl, it was a stupid fight, it was one

of my brother's ex-girlfriends, I was drunk and beat her up. She charged me and I

ended up spending the summer in [juvenile prison]. The principal had heard a lot

of bad things about me, so he didn't want me to attend the school, and he was

giving me reasons why I shouldn't attend.

During her time in prison, Raven reflected on where her life was going, and
decided to dedicate her energy to her schooling, and to follow the conditions of her
probation order upon her release. Still, her criminal history kept affecting her life,
especially at school. Raven recalled the difficulty she had returning to high school after
the summer in jail:

I never committed any violent acts at school or anything...and the school I

attended before going there I got straight A's and was on the honour roll two

semesters in a row and he (the principal) *was trying to push me in to all of these*

different alternative schools...and he was bringing up my criminal record, saying,

like I might get into fights at schools because of it.

In her opinion, the efforts of the principal had more to do with her racialized status as a
First Nation's person than anything else:

The only thing I could see was that he didn't want me in his school because I was

native because a lot of native students have lower grades and a hard time with

academics and stuff like that, and he was stereotyping me as another native that

needed to be put in an alternative school.

Raven resisted the efforts the Principal was making to marginalize her into an alternate
program because she felt it was unjust and knew that the alternative schools would not
allow her to achieve the kind of credits required to transfer to college or university later
on.

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All of the alternative schools he tried to put me into I had already done my

research on, and like they were all non-academic and you would not get real

credits for the work you were doing.

The principal would only allow her to go to the school after a trial period at another

school, where if she satisfied his specifications for attendance, grades, and no fights, he

would re-consider her admission. When asked how she felt about the experience, she

explained emphatically:

I was really mad, and it was BULLLSHIT – I didn't care, I wasn't going to go

jump through hoops after like I had done so much to change my life....

Raven did not expect the attempt of the Principal to marginalize her into what she saw as

a second rate school just because of her Aboriginal identity. In the end her response to

these challenges are both awe-inspiring and heartbreaking.

...I wrote a letter to the School Board, and I got like five other people to write a

letter on my behalf in all on the same day, and the next day I got a phone call

from the principal himself saying that I was able to attend...I ended up dropping

out of this school after all that because like (voice quivering) *there was still a lot*

of mistreatment by the principal towards me and it just made it a lot harder than

it needed to be.

The experiences in the education system that Raven describes so poignantly are not

unlike other experiences discussed in the stage one focus groups, and findings from the

survey. Others in *Girlz Group* shared racialized experiences similar to what Raven faced

with the high school Principal. Most girls in the group had at least one experience to

share in which they were subtly treated as inferior, talked down to and stereotyped as "*dirty Indians*" and "*welfare bums.*"

Coming from a position marginalized by her young age, her female gender, and with little power based on her criminalized status, Raven resisted against the various layers of inequality at play in this scenario to triumph over the typical white, male oppressor.

The way that Raven responded to this incident, however, was not typical of other girls in the group. Other *Girlz Group* members had described how it was too hard to confront the racism that persisted so rampantly in the schools. One participant from the first cycle focus group indicated it was just "*easier to fade away*" (Participant 3) and dropped out of school, while another internalised the racism she felt, feeling "*stupid*" and "*ugly,*" and although she never explicitly stated feeling suicidal in the group setting, she shared this thought with me through casual conversation after the group (Participant 4).

The topic of racism, which the girls experienced as damaging to their souls, elicited more tears than discussion of any other form of violence through the life of this project. Indeed, the facilitators and I had to diffuse the energy, by redirecting the discussion to a more light-hearted brainstorm about coping skills they have learned to deal with emotionally charged situations, which included: "*Bitch about it, have a smoke, fight back, band together, seek advice, and walk away.*"

Explanation

In the process of reviewing the cycle one findings through the feedback focus group, the anger and feelings of mistreatment in the room resurfaced, but the young women of this group generally felt that it is not helpful to dwell on your anger. For

instance, Peta explained *"It's kind of hard living in this community as a First Nation's woman, but if you show your weakness then obviously it's going to bring you down, but if you try to recognize your strengths and build on that and grow on that then you will get somewhere."*

Peta objects to the generalizing racist stereotype of Aboriginal people as *"drug addicts and drunks,"* and the general public attitude that Aboriginal people have only themselves to blame for their widespread misfortunes, such as their criminalization, and the violence they face.

> *Like, I just hate how all of those women from the downtown eastside were taken to the pig farm, and how nobody even cared that they were missing because they were mostly native prostitutes. I don't like the fact that people are labelling Aboriginal people as drug addicts because they are trying to pick up their lives...but they get pushed down there [inner city neighbourhood] because of what they have to deal with, and it only seems like they're all drug addicts because they are on the streets and stuff. Other races do drugs too, they are just not as visible.*

Moving on to a discussion of "the perverts" and sexual harassment faced by First Nation's women, Raven shared an experience from her early adolescence that framed the discussion:

> *Six years ago, in the area that I lived at the time, there were a lot of prostitutes in the area, and I was 12 or 13 and I would be walking home late at night, and older men would drive up and try to pick me up, and they would offer money, and try to buy me for the night. I would swear at them, and kick their cars, or spit at them*

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and tell them off. At the time I wasn't scared, I thought I was tough shit, and here

I was, 12 years old, not even a hundred pounds soaking wet, there is not much I

could have done if they tried to force me into their car. I was vulnerable, and

now, looking back I realize I should have been scared.

Winona related to this feeling of vulnerability, noting a similar experience of

harassment that frightened her:

I remember this one time I was walking home from babysitting at [street

intersection], and these three guys in a car were trying to grab me all the way to

[street name, two blocks up], *they kept asking me if I wanted a ride, to come*

party, to hurry up and get in the car, and I said NO, NO, leave me alone, over and

over, and they wouldn't leave me alone. I was crying, and terrified that they

would hurt me. Then this other car pulled up and asked me, if I wanted a ride

home, that he saw what happened, and wanted to make sure I got home OK, I was

so scared, I asked him to drive along beside me until I got home, and then I ran in

and locked the door behind me. I was scared for my life.

This experience of being mistaken for a prostitute appears not so accidental when you

consider that four of the five final focus group advisors had similarly been mistaken as a

prostitute. There is a prevalent perspective in the area that First Nation's girls are

sexually available, and they are treated as sex objects. Their marginalized status as lower

class females not only resulted in their being stereotyped, it also affects how they are

treated on a day to day basis, and puts them in a position of vulnerability to violence.

Focus Group III: Improving Youth and Police Relationships in the Community

Challenges

Although there has been a diversity of experiences with respect to most of the issues raised in our *Girlz Group*, if there is a single common experience among them, it is a negative encounter with the police. While they are careful to note that police are not all the same, and not every police officer means harm, they all had memories to share where they personally felt they were mistreated, or that a close family member or friend, had been mistreated by the police. Through careful probing, and numerous personal examples provided, the girls concluded that the police exercised their power unfairly through over-surveillance, harassment, stereotypical policing decisions, and the use of unreasonable levels of violence in arresting native youth, and failed to protect them when their help was needed. For instance, in Winona's experience above, she explained that she did not contact the police because she felt they would not take any action about her feelings of being in danger. Further, as discussed in more detail below, Raven knew of numerous examples of friends and family being attacked unnecessarily by police dogs in arrest. Due to the commonality of such negative experiences, a focus group topic was dedicated to understanding the relationship of First Nation's youth with the police and they were further questioned about how the situation could be improved.

Some of their suggestions for improvement were quite frank, and included:

- *Stop beating down on young First Nation's kids (Participant 12);*

- *[Get] out of your uniforms in the community and get to know the kids (Participant 7);*

- *Stop assaults and start policing themselves (as they commit crimes also) (Participant 10);* and,

- *Get rid of the police who beat up and steal from people in the community "(Participant 12).*

One unique idea involved setting up a post-secondary education scholarship for Aboriginal youth going to school for justice related employment, such as law, social work, and counseling (Participant 7). Still, some were skeptical that First Nation's youth would participate in police-hosted events or programs. Instead, ideas for getting youth off the street and out of police beats were suggested such as launching a drop-in centre for teens, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Through discussion, it was agreed that the police do not seem to hear or believe what they have to say. One girl explained that stories of adult complainants are always taken as truth, while youth voices are assumed to be lies, and another explained, *"Youth don't have a voice because the police side of the story is always taken as truth...they have power and they don't really care* (about us)" (Participant 2). This angered her because *"not all adults tell the truth"* (Participant 2). While it is probably true that often the youth do lie, and the police are believed, it is important to consider what is being communicated here – that is, the voice of the girls is not accorded value in police-youth interactions, and contributes to their frustration, lack of trust, and disdain for the authorities.

As First Nation's girls, they claim to routinely face racialized stereotypes about their "criminality," a process Jiwani (2002b) refers to the racialization of crime, and the criminalization of race. As young people, their voices of complaint of harassment or mistreatment have little force or effect. The intersections of these categories come

together in their regular interactions with police. Through their experiences, they felt very strongly that in comparison to non-native youth, they are often oversurveilled by police when their presence is not required, and under protected when they experience violence in the communities, and in their homes.

In general the girls of this group felt that they had little reason to believe that the relationship between the youth and the community could be repaired, or that their views would matter. However, there was group consensus to one girl's statement that "*we want an outlet to tell our stories of harassment, and assault...Police let us be violated against*" (Participant 6). In order for the relationship to improve, they felt police would have to withhold judgment and stereotype, and "*get to know us, see our good side, see who we really are*" (Participant 9). They also felt that the police role with youth and First Nation's people should be less focused on surveillance, and more on ensuring safety of First Nation's youth, and assisting them in crisis situations.

Explanation

This discussion characterized the relationships between the police and the *Girlz Group* participants, their families, and their friends as one rife with conflict, suspicion and prejudice. Some of the most heated discussions in *Girlz Group* have followed mention of police involvement in the personal lives of First Nation's people. This is an important conflict to deconstruct through an intersectional lens to understand the barriers to violence prevention. Indeed, police are situated at the gateway of so many justice services from emergency situations, to reporting crime, to assisting in collecting evidence for trial, and enforcing protection orders. The vulnerability of these girls and their

families is enhanced by this conflict. A few stories shared at the feedback focus group are instructive in the deconstruction of this relationship.

Raven had several stories to share involving brutal police violence at a level far beyond what would be considered legal, or reasonably justified by the context in which they occurred. For instance, she recalled an incident involving the police chasing her friends who were in a stolen car, and got pulled over.

> *They got out of the car umm, without any resistance, just like they were asked,*
> *and the cops had a dog with them. They told my friend to lie on the ground, he*
> *listened, and he had his hands on his head, and they released the dog on him*
> *anyway. The dog took a big chunk of flesh out of his leg.*

In a similar experience of extreme violence, she explained that the police were harassing her late cousin who was walking home drunk, and was being very mouthy in return. He was punished severely for challenging the police officers:

> *They took him out to the docks and beat the shit out of him and his friend for like*
> *half an hour, and then dumped them off on the street after it was too late to catch*
> *transit.*

When I asked her about how she made sense of these experiences, she explained, "*I guess they feel that this is how they need to control our youth so that our youth do not act out. But it's not helping, it's only making their resentment for police officers grow.*"

This resentment of police officers has a long history, and cannot be understood apart from the role that police have played in the history of colonization, residential schools and child apprehensions. Nina reasoned, "*I think it goes ALL the way back to residential school, because they came into our land and enforced the rules of Canada*

onto our people. " Although she understands the current day struggles between the youth and the police, "*cuz I used to feel the same*" she argued solely that both the youth and police have to address the hatred and abuse inflicted both ways, and make an effort to change the situation. "*Somewhere it has to end. I don't want my kids to grow up and like start hating on cops. And it's not just about getting the police to trust us again, but us getting to trust the police again.* "

Survey: Inner City Youth Needs and Resources

As was discussed above in brief, an *Inner City Youth Needs and Resources Survey* was created in consultation and collaboration with the *Girlz Group*. This survey captures the girls' experience-driven concerns they feel youth in their inner city neighbourhood face daily as identified in our first 10 months of collaborations. This survey served the dual purposes of furthering group process and meeting the research priorities of the funding agency.[17] The issues addressed in this survey were drawn from the everyday experiences and concerns of the young participants of *Girlz Group*. In brief, the purpose of this survey was "*to allow an exploratory assessment of both the needs and potential resources of marginalized inner-city youth in their community contexts, and the challenges and barriers that are present in accessing services to promote their healthy development*" (Haley, 2005, p. 13).

The survey was distributed at an open house and youth information fair hosted by the *Girlz Group* in the gym of the inner city school where our groups runs. At this event, twenty local community agencies providing community-based information, resource and outreach services to youth set up display booths describing their services. The agenda for

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[17] The National Crime Prevention Centre is recognized for providing funding for the creation of a Needs Assessment Questionnaire.

the event included recreational activities and scavenger hunts to encourage interest and networking between the youth and the agencies in attendance. In this sense, the event provided a community service. Both boys and girls under the age of 21 who attended the event were invited to complete the survey. Of the 250 community members who attended the event, 66 completed the survey[18]. Fourty-four percent of the sample was male and 56% was female. Aboriginal respondents made up 77.3% while 13.6% reported to be of mixed background, 7.6% reported "other", (eg. Gypsy, Kurdish), and a small proportion (1.5%) reported Caucasian ethnicity. The mean age of the sample was 15.6 years old (Haley, 2005, p. 14).

Survey Results

In my thesis, the results of this survey functioned to place the *Girlz Group* voices and experiences in the social and community context. Furthermore, the results of the survey were discussed with the girls to add to another layer of insight into their experiences. This self-report survey was composed of five themes of open- and closed-ended questions addressing each respondents': 1) demographic information; 2) utilization of and barriers to accessing needed services; 3) perspectives about challenges youth face and self-report of those they themselves face; 4) ideas for community social development; and 5) their self-report of their own social resources/social capital.

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[18] Most of the Open House participants who did not participate in the survey fell outside the age range of the population of interest.

Challenges

"Most significant issues facing inner city teens"

As part of this survey, the youth respondents were asked to indicate what they felt

were the most significant issues teens face today. The responses of the survey were

coded into themes. The top three themes of concern to this inner-city sample were

substance abuse, violence, and crime. Over two-thirds of the open-ended responses

contained reference to concerns over illicit drugs, and over one-half of the responses

named [alcoholic] drinking. The *Girlz Group* girls strongly agreed with a concern

captured by a respondent who noted: *"Pre-teen youth are getting into really harsh street*

drugs like meth [amphetamines] and rock" (Haley, 2005, p. 14). Most girls in the group

noted they did not individually have experience with these *"really harsh street drugs"* but

shared a concern for friends or family members struggling with drug and/or alcohol

problems.

The forms of violence addressed in the survey included community violence, such

as *"turf wars"*, institutional abuses of authority such as *"police brutality,"* and more

generally, *"racism"* (Haley, 2005, p. 22). Some responses under the theme of

psychological challenges included *"no-one listens, shyness,* and *isolation,"* while

socioeconomic challenges named included *"poverty"* and *"homelessness."* Challenges

named but not captured by a theme heading were "peer pressure" and "teen pregnancy."

Teen parenthood was a reality for a large proportion of this sample, with 22.7% of the

sample reporting to have at least one child (p. 14). The issue of teen parenthood was

more prominent for girls as the demographic questions revealed twice as many girls as

boys reported having their own children (14). Under the theme of "crime," respondents

reported the following: "theft," "robbery," "*smash 'n grabs*," "*trafficking*," and "*stealing cars*" (Haley, 2005, p. 14).

"Community Strengths"

Not all of the questions related to the challenges the girls faced. There were some positives also noted. The youth of this survey generally expressed a great deal of pride in the community. For instance, the most common responses to a question about community strengths applauded its existing places and spaces that stand for valued resources in this high-need community. For instance, respondents valued the local native youth drop-in centre, the Friendship centre, as well as various outreach programs, schools, and parks. Several youth believed that everyday people in the community are a strength, noting there are many "*good people*", "*lots of friends*," "*great adults*" and "*good staff*" around. Also, it was declared that families and friendships are strong, people are fun, and that local residents had "*good hearts and minds*" (Haley, 2005, p. 14).

For some, the sense of community amity was the greatest community strength: "*It's close-knit*", "*supportive*," "*togetherness*," "*people know each other*," and "*we all watch out for each other*." Also, civic participation in community issues was commended, as neighbours "*recognize some issues in the community and work to address them*." In particular, the camaraderie within the First Nation's population was valued as noted by comments such as "*the unity of First Nation's*," and "*native people stick together*" (Haley, 2005, p. 15).

"Community Changes"

In terms of what changes the youth felt could enhance their community, I coded the open-ended responses under the themes of what they would *cut, copy, add* or *edit* in

their community. Some respondents indicated they would do without the following: *drugs; teen pregnancy; alcohol; crime; judgments and perceptions; racism; smoking; bullying; fighting; and funding gaps"* (Haley, 2005, p. 25). The "edits" suggested are captured by the following responses: *"Better housing; affordable housing; help the neglected; fix the buildings; clean up the community; nicer police; better security; improve gyms; improve drop-ins;* and *less police* (Haley, 2005, p. 25).

Although the youth of this survey enjoyed a lot about what the community had to offer, their expressed need for pro-social activities and teen-friendly spaces cannot be understated. For instance, the following responses were coded as "add" requests: *"Youth programs;" "more sports;" "more community events with free food;" "more opportunities to receive career guidance;" "educational guidance;" "help for the homeless and the addicts,"* and *"information about community events and services."* Further, more places to hang out, *"especially on weekends"* and *"more fun things for kids to do,"* like free *"basketball"* and *"baseball"* (Haley, 2005, p. 25).

The findings of this survey indicated that female respondents of this survey have high needs in comparison to boys as shown by the following three findings:

1) Girls report a broader range of needs across the full 19 categories reviewed than boys;

2) Girls reported higher rates of needs for 18 of the 19 service types assessed, and the scores were significantly higher in six of the service types;

3) Girls are far less likely than boys to have accessed the services needed (Haley, 2005, p. 4).

The single most pertinent barrier preventing both boys and girls of this survey from accessing needed services was transportation. The *Girlz Group* felt that the cost of bus fare in their community was much higher in recent years, and considered unaffordable by inner city youth. While it is true that youth attending school are provided with a bus pass, the youth who are missed are those who are not attending school regularly or who have dropped out – by definition, those with higher needs. Thus, the group has made a valid suggestion to improve services to youth living in the inner city, who have relatively fewer resources, and relatively higher needs (Haley, 2005).

Compared to boys, girls were found to be more likely to report fear to ask for help and a lack of knowledge about available services as their greatest barriers (Haley, 2005). It is crucial for community services to address in a coordinated fashion these barriers to improve service delivery to the marginalized young women of the inner city.

Explanation

With respect to this lack of knowledge, the final feedback group advisers felt that public education campaigns about community services should broadly target youth located in both public AND private spheres. Sceptical of the value of school-based public education, two girls explained together that the information would not reach some of the *"youth who need it most"* including: *"youth who skip school...expelled youth,"* and *drop-out[s] "* (Little Star), and *"stay-at-home [teen] moms and homeless youth"* (Winona). Further, noting the survey finding that peer networks were the single most important referral source for the services respondents did access (62.1%), one *Girlz Group* consultant made meaning with a gender-based observation. *"Well, I'm not saying that this is a cause of it or anything, but it seems like [if] guys are going to do*

something...they do it, whereas girls [sic] want a girl to go with them (Raven).

Following this lead, Nina (Age 17) explains *"Girlz are more personal, guys try to be independent whereas girls really like to reach out to their friends more than guys do."* Nina and Raven felt that this need to have a girlfriend with them would partially explain why girls were less likely to access the services they needed. There was a lot of interest in making meaning of this survey finding. Little Star and Raven continued by sharing personal fears and reservations about speaking to counsellors. For instance, Raven began:

> *Like there was a time when I had a problem with alcohol, and I didn't get help, I dealt with it all on my own, and like it would have been a lot easier if I would have asked for help...[but] I don't like meeting new people, counsellors especially because I might get attached to this person, and then, who knows how long they are going to be a part of my life, you know?*

Little Star shared a similar concern over the fleeting involvement of counsellors in her life: *"I did go to counsellors but then someone else was taking over the job, and then you would have to go through that over and over again."* Peta agreed with both Raven and Little Star, explaining that girls are afraid or shy to ask for emotional help, and this may relate to difficulty trusting counsellors to be in their lives long enough to help with emotional problems.

Taking into consideration these hypotheses, Raven explained, the girls' low access rates for needed services could also be partially explained by the fact that they are turning to their friends more than anything when they need help, and, since their female peers are noted as their main source of referral for available services according to the survey, *"if my friends do not know about what is available, then how will I know?"*

Responding to this line of reasoning, Leotie further stated, "...*Or, if my friends didn't like how they were treated when they asked for help, why would I even try?*"

Finally, and the most resounding message, through this survey, the *Girlz Group* focus groups, and informal discussions throughout this project, the youth of this community fervently suggest a 24-hour drop-in youth centre be opened in the neighbourhood, or at least open late every evening. The girls all agreed that a drop-in centre open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is needed to reduce crime and victimization among youth in the inner city. They felt that there many youth who are out late at night are escaping a difficult situation at home, or do not have a place to stay (Haley, 2005, p. 25). Through consultation of the survey results, the girls of this group insisted they want program developers to know that they feel it is crucial to involve the voices of the inner city youth themselves in any consultation or planning of such a centre or risk it being irrelevant to their lived realities.

CHAPTER 5:
INTERSECTIONALITY DISCUSSION

Girlz Group rocks, everybody talks,
No boys are allowed, we girls are proud.
(*Girlz Group* Participant, Newsletter, July 2004)

The final stage of my intersectionality framework is analysis: that is, why there is

reason to believe that the issues problematized through discussion with the *Girlz Group*

are based on an intersectionality of oppressions.   In this section, the issues rose through

previous focus groups as well as situated in the context of individual stories are now

placed in the nexus of the class, race and gender relations. Instructive examples of issues

raised through the various methods employed up until now are provided here with

sensitivity to biography to demonstrate how the structures which confront each girl's life

have been a part of her history, providing the context for how these structures have

played out in her everyday life.

Again, my research question guiding this discussion is how my young

participants, who face vulnerability to violence by virtue of their marginalized social

location as racialized First Nation's girls, have survived through the evident permanence

of violence in their lives. This process-oriented approach to analysing women's

experiences is valued in feminist research because it is women-centred, and women are

seen as making choices which can be analysed by social situation and the oppressive

conditions that operate to limit choices.

To begin, it is helpful to step back from the individual stories reviewed above, and explain the importance of the different categories of a person's being, and the dynamic roles they play in everyday experiences. From a framework of intersectionality, the lives of each individual girl are made up of different categories of identity that, at different times and places are central to her being and capacity to act in her social world. Categories such as her race, gender, and her social class are factors that are at play most of the time, occurring simultaneously, and interactively, while other categories are rarely at play. In the final focus group discussion, Leotie herself began to explain the relationship of racism to violence, and did so in a way that sounded much like intersectional analysis; accounting for many categories of a person's being in the process. She explained:

> *Well, I don't know, I don't think racism [causes violence], well it is a big part of*
>
> *it, but like there's a whole bunch of parts of violence, like it could be maybe, like*
>
> *maybe an east Indian person that's like gay, or whatever, I mean, two-spirited,*
>
> *and there's lots of things put into the racism he faces, like maybe it starts with*
>
> *racism, but these other parts lead to violence.*

In this example, Leotie expresses her understanding of how there are different marginalizing forces that create vulnerability to violence. A homosexual East Indian male may face homophobia and racism that together make him more likely to face violence in his social world. The different categories of an individual's identity may place them in positions of dominance, such as being white, male, and rich, or closer to the margins, routinely facing subordination as in the situation of the lives of many Aboriginal girls. The question about *how* the marginalization of these First Nation's girls takes place and

how different kinds of discriminations converge in their lives is a process that is largely

hidden from view. To clearly bring these processes into view, I discuss three concrete

examples from the group narratives to demonstrate how sexism, classism, and racism

come together in their lives. In doing so, I highlight their strategies of coping and

resistance.

Individual Voice I: Little Star and Intersecting Oppressions at School

To begin, I would like to refer back to the difficult experiences Little Star faced in

grade school. Little Star shared a specific experience of being criticized by classmates for

receiving a lower mark than others on a class project. It was her view that the criticism

was directed at her identity as a First Nation's woman. Throughout her school life, she

had felt ashamed of her identity, was teased for being poor and wearing second hand

clothing, and felt excluded from group projects because of her race. Little Star could not

separate the ridicule she faced from her whole identity as an Aboriginal girl. Her

exclusion from class activities, and the teacher's lack of interest in protecting her from

attack were symbolic gestures of her value as seen by others in the classroom context.

This mistreatment led to violence as a strategy of resisting the negative valuations made

about her as a person.

Gendered and class related forms of racism are implicated in Little Star's

experiences. The images of First Nation's girls as "ugly," "dirty," and "stupid" have a

long history in Canada, dating back to the colonization of First Nation's people. The

worth and value of First Nation's women has been under continued attack. Once valued

as the givers of life, First Nation's girls today find that they constantly have to prove to

others that they should be valued by challenging the stereotypes of modern images of

First Nation's women. In the moment that Little Star experienced the racial remark

insulting her intelligence as a *"just another dumb native,"* every earlier experience of

attack on her person came to bear. She decided she would no longer feel ashamed of her

brown skin, and her second hand clothing – she decided to react with violence. In the

past, she had tried every other way of managing the subordination she felt: first ignoring

the insults, seeking help from teachers, and defending herself with words. Then, she tried

fighting back. Still, she felt marginalized in the classroom environment. After this

experience, her coping strategies involved quitting school, running away from home,

counselling, and finally, she has consulted traditional healing practices such as sweat

ceremonies, and drumming.

Little Star's sense of self was influenced by her experiences of racism and her

mistreatment and exclusion doing to her First Nation's status, and being poor. These

intersecting forms of oppression operated dynamically in her experiences. Her response

to the insult cannot be explained through a primarily patriarchal, anti-racist, or capitalist

lens. Multiple spheres of inequality were implicated in this scenario.

This experience clearly highlights the importance of making sense of this

seemingly minor classroom conflict through a framework of intersectionality. An

intersectional snapshot of this experience makes visible the complexity of that

interaction, and the harmful effects these oppressive processes create in her survival as a

First Nation's women. The importance of focusing on systemic factors of women's

vulnerability to violence is clear. For example, a micro-level theory, such as one focused

on individual behavioural deficits or "risk factors" like FAS or ADHD, would be

inadequate to make visible the processes at play complicating Little Star's everyday

experiences. A similar argument was made by Jackson (2004), who explained through a review of three studies that a sensitivity to social context highlighted the importance of looking at how socio-cultural factors themselves are "risky" for girls (See Moretti, Odgers & Jackson 2004, for a more detailed discussion of risk research).

Individual Voice II: Raven and the Lack of Fit of the Social Welfare System

Explaining the importance of colonization on the difficulties faced by First Nation's youth, Raven stated the following:

> *I think that, there is a lot of native youth that ARE going out and getting drunk, and ARE getting in trouble and I think that has a lot to do with their family life. And people say we can't blame residential school cause that happened like forever ago, but the thing is, the families did not come out and say, O.K., I'm going to forget the abuse and go raise a family and be fine right, cause they are abusing their children, and those children are now abusing their own children. I grew up with abuse and neglect and all this stuff, and I turned out doing bad things in the community and stuff.*

A family member who suffered abuse in residential school repetitively physically and sexually abused Raven's mother as a child. Accordingly, Raven grew up as a neglected child. Due to the neglect she faces, the police apprehended her from her mother for the first time at the age of four. Her experience with the police really frightened her. She explains:

> *They came and took us out of our beds in the middle of the night, and didn't even grab our jackets or our shoes. Mom warned us they would come to get us soon, so we tried to stop them from finding us by taking the light bulbs out of our lamps,*

and putting thumb tacks on the stairs, but they had flashlights, and came after we were asleep (Raven).

After that, the abuse she faced continued in the foster homes. *"I've been in a lot of foster homes. Most of them were abusive, mainly verbal, but sometimes physical too."* The police could not protect her from the violence that she faced. She was too young to ask for help. She struggled on her own to deal with her feelings of abandonment, displacement, and anger for the abuses she suffered. As a young child she grappled with less than the basic necessities to survive, often going hungry. The psychological hardship of struggling to provide for her brothers and sisters caused her feelings of hopelessness of her future.

Raven doubted that she had what it took to finish school, and never dreamed of attending college, explaining that she felt she would never escape a world full of poverty and abuse. Raven coped by banding together with her peers and her siblings to provide each other protection from violence, and to resist against the racism they experienced daily. Throughout her childhood and adolescence, the social welfare system was not responsive to help her manage the challenges she faced daily. As in her quote before, she herself started, *"I turned out doing bad things in the community."* From the social welfare system to education, and eventually jail and probation, Raven was not protected from violence at home and in the community – she chose to do whatever she had to do to survive.

In Raven's experience, the history of colonization is continuing to have an impact on her family and herself. In addition to the ongoing effects of colonization, as played out in the abuse she faced at home, Raven's young age and female gender, Raven

suffered the burden of taking on the caretaker's role in her family. At times, she would also take care of her mother who was still struggling with addictions. This is a tall order for a child. The social welfare system is not responsive to how interlocking systems of race, gender and class creates enormous burdens for the First Nation's Girl Child. This snapshot of her experience highlights the need to have a social welfare system based on an in-depth and systematic intersectional assessment of barriers preventing the First Nation's Girl Child to access culturally sensitive social resources responsive to her daily reality.

Individual Voice III: Winona, Stereotypes and Sexual Harassment

For my final individual voice narrative, I refer back to Winona's experience of being followed by two men who mistook her for a prostitute. Her experience provides further evidence for my finding that gender, class and race intersect to shape First Nation's women's experiences of violence. The visible categories of her identity were the important situational cues that created the strong sense of fear when the two men followed her on her walk home that evening. For Winona, racism and sexism operated together in this scenario as felt she was being treated like a sexual object. Winona did not invite the harassment she experienced that evening – the men who followed her were operating on sexist stereotypes of Aboriginal women as sexually promiscuous. The sexual violence she experienced is related to racism that is grounded both in history and in sexist and racist messages transmitted through institutions such as media, education, and the justice system.

Winona explained that although this violent experience made her fear for her life, she did not phone the police because she "knew" they would not help her. The

experience permanently affected her feelings of safety on the street, and she is now always careful to watch her back when walking alone. Winona essentially has coped by accepting that she has little power to change the stereotypes that placed her in a position of vulnerability. She has learned to live with the fear because she does not have the power to change her social location in the community.

Individual Voices: Final Interpretation

These intersectionality analyses have revealed the importance of focusing not only on the specific victimization experiences, such as those described by Raven, Little Star, and Winona. It is also important to consider the unique strategies of resistance that emerge here, and that demonstrate women's diverse ways of surviving through the oppressive systems that shape their life chances.

Throughout their lives, these girls have survived by: Internalizing the racist and gender-based stereotypes they experienced; responding violently in protest of these stereotypes; seeking support from family and friends; writing poetry, seeking counselling; singing, drumming and dancing; hurting themselves and contemplating suicide, pursuing legal action, joining groups dedicated to ending violence against women, and raising their voices against the injustices they face. They are survivors - they are women warriors.

CONCLUSION

My hopes for the future are that I get my own place,
and stop sleeping on the floor or a couch.
I also want to finish school, and be able to go to college
or university so I will be able to work in the community.
And what else, hmm, (she smiles and rolls her eyes),
Maybe be a professional back up dancer, you know, be on T.V.
(Little Star, Age 20, Final Focus Group).

Violence and discrimination are common and concerning experiences shared by the girls of this project, particularly with respect to their interactions with police in the inner city, the sexual harassment they face in the inner city community and racism across different sectors of the youth service delivery network, from school administration to the justice system. Their vulnerability to the experiences they face cannot be primarily attributed to their female gender, their racialized status, or to the poverty they face, but rather, results from complex and interacting forms of oppressions made visible through ongoing dialogue and collaborative methods.

Through this exploratory thesis, the central aim has been to make meaning of the everyday experiences of violence in adolescent aboriginal girls lives from a framework of intersectionality. I have demonstrated that the violence in the lives of young First Nation's women cannot be fully understood without an examination of the historic and ongoing colonization of First Nation's girls. The violence they face was explained on a broad continuum, and supported by my exploratory intersectional investigation. Furthermore, I have contributed to the developing field of intersectionality by detailing

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how the method can be applied in the specific case of Aboriginal girls in the urban setting.

The PAR method provided a way for this social inquiry to contribute to mutual learning experiences, to keep the inquiry rooted in the experiential realities of the young women and to unite the girls towards social change. The social changes they sought were addressing inadequacies in social supports in the community, and teaching younger women how to survive through their adolescence by sharing their stories with younger First Nation's women. Although the *Girlz Group* was initiated to conduct research, an additional goal was to support the development of a community-based, gender-specific, and culturally relevant programme to support the expressed needs of this highly marginalized population. The *Girlz Group* is continuing to work together beyond the completion of my study, and they are currently developing a mentorship component to their group. In so doing, this project has made a praxis contribution as well.

The research of this project describes the inner city community as built upon their relationships with family. The voices of the *Girlz Group* highlight the sense of pride they have developed for their cultural traditions, and practices. In the community, their actions demonstrate their resistance to the oppressions they have faced enthusiastically, and with a willingness to work collaboratively. The young women of this group face sexual harassment based on inaccurate stereotypes about First Nation's people. When they complain about such harassment to the authorities and to service providers, their claims are seldom taken seriously which enhances their vulnerability to victimization and violence. Furthermore, a lack of attunement to the ongoing effects of colonization contributes to the lack of fit between the girls' needs and the operation of the social

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systems. In order for First Nation's people to have equal access to citizenship in Canada, services have to be responsive to the intersections of their lives. Currently, front-line services are inadequate to address these intersections.

The *Girlz Group* participants routinely fight harsh and inaccurate stereotypes of their identities as First Nation's women based on their "race," gender and marginalized social positioning and lower economic class. The *Girlz Group* has been a safe space for these girls to actively challenge and breakdown public misperceptions, and creates room for the development of new and positive images and identities. The *Girlz Group* model, being a feminist PAR approach, has provided rich data about the girl's struggles and their resilience in the face of violence and discrimination.

Limitations of the Project

There are some limitations to the knowledge developed through this project. First, it must be understood that the findings of this project cannot be stated to apply beyond the experiences of the participants involved. The participant group is not considered representative of the sampling pool from which it was drawn, as the sample was purposive. Although this affects the generalizability of the results, I took many steps to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. In terms of reliability, the data were collected through multiple and ongoing methods and continuously involved the participants in keeping the research rooted in their realities by involving them into the problem definition, the development of the research materials, and member-checking, that is confirming the analyses accurately reflected their true meanings. Furthermore, this project sought to ensure validity not through representative sampling, but through flexible

research design, being reflexive in the interpretation of the results, and contributing to catalytic validity through a praxis approach.

Second, it must also be stated that my interaction with the girls most certainly contributed in some manner to the direction of discussion, and the interpretation of the results. The data collection procedures of this project were dialectical. As noted in chapter four above, the discourse between the girls and me has been active, with the questions and responses formulated through conversation. Therefore, my presence and role in the research most definitely contributed to the direction of the research, and the findings.

Third, given that my research employed PAR and was carried out within the context of a larger study, there were multiple agendas being pursued simultaneously through the research. As such, power struggles and conflict may have affected the results. Nevertheless, these limitations have little bearing on the contribution of these findings to the developing framework of intersectionality and to the cause of the elimination of violence against women. The findings of this research contribute new knowledge, and have implications for the community in which it is rooted.

Recommendations for Violence Prevention Programming

Throughout this project, there were many recommendations for violence prevention programming proposed by the *Girlz Group*. The first recommendation is that the voices of youth must be included in all stages of programming development, from brainstorming possibilities through to implementation, and evaluation. Without youth voices at the table, the service delivery network is likely to further marginalize First Nation's youth. Secondly, the front-line service delivery network should hire staff

members who have real life experience that reflect the lives of the clients. This is important because the young women of this project noted their difficulty developing rapport and trust with counsellors differently situated than themselves. Third, Government funding needs to be applied with a long-term vision of the empowerment of the current and future generations of First Nation's youth. The fourth and most resounding recommendation that has been repeated throughout this project is the need for a drop-in centre open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Drop-in Centres were reported to be the most commonly accessed resource in their lives, with the only complaint being that they are not open often enough. The drop-in centres provide a meeting place for friends, information about available services, opportunities to develop life skills, recreational activities, and countless other resources. A 24-7 drop-in centre in the inner city would provide the primary resource capable of preventing violence in the lives of these First Nation's girls.

From my perspective, the Government of British Columbia should further develop a coordinated approach to service delivery between various ministries that affect the lives of First Nation's girls. The way that the social welfare system is currently operating is confusing, complex, and allows too many young women who are struggling to survive to fall through the cracks. My final addition to the recommendations made by the girls is that violence prevention programs must exercise flexibility in their operation in order to be flexible to the diverse needs of marginalized girls. Program models that operate from a strengths-based framework based on empowerment are more likely to be successful with this population of girls.

Future Directions

In this project, I have chosen to apply a model of intersectionality to the everyday experiences of my participants. I suggest that it is important for future projects to apply a model of intersectionality from a framework of human rights. I believe a legal analysis of the experiences of the young women in this project would highlight harmful human rights abuses, have implications for issues of Self Government and land claims in Canada as they affect the human rights of Indigenous women.

I further recommend that future research employ a multi-generational case study analysis of First Nation's families. A focus on the family unit is necessary and families play such a central role to the future well being of First Nation's girls. The individual cannot be fully supported without a deeper understanding of how violence is perpetuated across several generations following colonization.

Finally, although time did not allow it in my current project, a comparative analysis of First Nation's girls' experiences with other marginalized girls is one possible future direction for my research. A comparison between groups who are situated differently by social location, such as immigrant girls, would help to illuminate the themes of the different challenges faced by girls in different contexts. Whatever the approach, future research must actively involve youth whose voices have been traditionally silent and whose experiences are invisible. Research needs to empower participants or risk further marginalizing them, and researchers must question how their social locations affect the research process and be reflexive about their power

continuously. When researchers are committed as agents of social change in collaborative action, participatory democracy is supported, and the empowerment of marginalized voices is supported. This effort is essential to empower marginalized girls from the multiple oppressions sustaining the operation of violence in their lives.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Inner City Youth Needs and Resources Survey

Assessment of Inner City Youth Needs and Resources

This survey is ANONYMOUS and CONFIDENTIAL. Please DO NOT put your name on the survey.

A. Demographic Questions

1. **Your age is:** _____ years old.

2. **You are: (circle one).**

   a. Male   b. female

3. **Your ethnic background is (circle one):**

   a. Aboriginal   d. Vietnamese   g. Black

   b. Chinese   e. Hispanic   h. Other: _____ (print).

   c. Caucasian   f. South-East Asian   I. Mixed Background _____ (print).

4. **Your FIRST language is: (circle one)**

   a. English   c. Aboriginal language _____ (print).

   b. French   d. Other language _____ (print).

5. **The LAST GRADE you fully completed in school is:**   GRADE _____ (print).

   (eg. If you are in all grade 9 currently, the last grade you fully completed was 8; or, if you are in grade 8 and 9, the last grade you fully completed was 7.)

6. **Currently, you are:** (circle one)

   a. Attending School: _____ (name of your school).

   b. Not attending school

7. **You live with your:**

a. Your parents
b. Mother
c. Father
d. Foster parents(s)
e. Group home

f. I'm couch surfing
g. I live on my own
h. Other family member: _____
i. With a friend _____
j. Other: _____

8. **Your household income is approximately:** (circle one)

a. Under $20,000 per year;
b. $20,001 - $50,000 per year;
c. $50,001 - $100,000 per year;
d. Above $100,001 per year.
e. Don't know

Note: Household income is the total amount of
income of all members of your home
all sources.

9. **You live in (circle one):**

a. Vancouver, within 10 blocks of here;
b. Vancouver, more than 10 blocks away from here;
c. Outside Vancouver; _____ (name of town/city/village).

10. **Do you have children of your own? (Circle YES or NO).**

a. NO
b. YES——————If yes, how many? _____ (Number of children).
   ——————Age of your children _____ — — — (List their ages).

11. **Can you easily find out where to go for help in this community? (circle one answer, and explain your answer).**
Please briefly explain your answer: _____

a. Not at all
b. Sometimes
c. Often
d. Always

_____
_____
_____

B. Service Needs and Access to Services

11.	Check yes or no for each question under column A, then do column B.	A — Do you feel you NEED the following kinds of support from programs or services?		B — Have you RECEIVED the following kinds of support from community programs or services?	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1.	Drug and Alcohol Services	Yes	No	Yes	No
2.	Employment Services (eg. Help creating a resume or finding a job)	Yes	No	Yes	No
3.	Sex Education	Yes	No	Yes	No
4.	Housing Support (transition homes; help accessing safe affordable housing)	Yes	No	Yes	No
5.	Legal Advice and Advocacy (Information about my rights, help with my legal cases)	Yes	No	Yes	No
6.	Pregnancy Outreach Programs for teens	Yes	No	Yes	No
7.	Material assistance (eg. foodbanks, clothing, laundromat, bus tickets)	Yes	No	Yes	No
8.	Teen Centre (place to hang out with friends; free recreational programs)	Yes	No	Yes	No
9.	Financial Assistance (eg. independent living; youth agreement; welfare)	Yes	No	Yes	No
10.	Life Skills Training (eg. budgeting; cooking; communication skills)	Yes	No	Yes	No
11.	Survivors of Violence Support Services (crisis support; information, accompaniment to police, court, and hospital; counseling)	Yes	No	Yes	No
12.	Self-help groups (confidential and anonymous group meetings that involve people deal with a life-disrupting event, like abuse or addictions).	Yes	No	Yes	No
13.	Youth Drop-In Program (peer support; safe place to hang out evenings and weekends;)	Yes	No	Yes	No
14.	Recreational Services (eg. free sports programs, with equipment provided).	Yes	No	Yes	No

		Yes	No	Yes	No
15.	**Immigration services** (eg. Settlement services; English as a Second Language Training)	Yes	No	Yes	No
16.	**Cultural programs** (eg. Cultural education; cultural activities, art and activities)	Yes	No	Yes	No
17.	**Family support services** (eg. in-home supports; family therapy; parenting training; respite)	Yes	No	Yes	No
18.	**Mental Health Treatment** (eg. help dealing with a mental illness such as depression, ADHD conduct disorder, or eating disorder)	Yes	No	Yes	No
19	**Telephone Hotlines** (eg. crisis hotline for emergency counseling; or someone to give you advice about what services will help you).	Yes	No	Yes	No
20.	**Other** (fill in additional services you feel you need) _____	Yes	No	Yes	No
21.	**Other** _____	Yes	No	Yes	No

13. How did you find out about the services you have received? (Circle all that apply).

a. Advertising (pamphlets, posters, flyers, radio ads)

b. I was referred by a support worker

c. Friend told me about it

d. Telephone Information and Referral Service

e. Resource Centre (Eg. Broadway Youth Resource Centre)

f. Other _____

14. What kinds of things prevent you from getting help when you need it? (Circle all that apply).

a. Transportation Barriers (eg. don't have money for bus fare);

b. I have difficulty keeping appointments;

c. Language/Communication Barriers;

d. The services I want have no space or long waitlists;

e. I don't qualify for the programs/services I want; (eg. too old, too young, etc.);

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f. The services I want are never open when I have time;

g. I need someone to help me find the right help;

h. Family responsibilities – eg. Can't find the time because I am busy taking care of brothers and sisters, my own children, parents, or grandparents.

i. Appointment times are too strict;

j. I am afraid to ask for the help I need;

k. I don't know what is available;

l. Other _____

m. Other _____

n. None of the above

15.	How important is it that the staff at services you receive….(Place an X beside your answer)		
1.	Share your ethnic background?		
	___ Not at all	___ A Little	___ A lot	___ Not Sure
2.	Share your gender?		
	___ Not at all	___ A Little	___ A lot	___ Not Sure
3.	Have similar experiences as you?		
	___ Not at all	___ A Little	___ A lot	___ Not Sure

YOUTH CHALLENGES:

Thinking about you and your neighborhood peer group, what are some of the main social issues affecting teenagers today? (Eg. drugs; bullying;)

_____

_____

Youth today face many challenges as they grow up. Please place an X beside how frequently YOU are affected by the following challenges:

16.		Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1.	Racial Discrimination				
2.	Gender Discrimination				
3.	Age Discrimination				
4.	Being bullied				
5.	Surviving with very little food				
6.	Poor housing (eg. overcrowded, unsafe)				
7.	Negative peer pressure				
8.	Fighting				
9.	Emotional				
10.	Negative body image				
11.	Low Self-Esteem				
12.	Other: _____				

17.	How serious a problem do you think racial discrimination is: (Place an X under your answer to each question).	Very Serious	Fairly Serious	Not Too serious	Not Serious	No Opinion
1.	Where you live?					
2.	At your school?					
3.	In health care?					
4.	In legal practice (lawyers, courts)?					
5.	In the justice system? (police, laws, juries, trials)?					

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Community Development

18. What do you think are some of the best aspects (strengths) of your neighborhood/community?

_____

_____

19. If you could make any changes you want to your community, what would they be?

_____

_____

Youth Resources

21.	How much do you feel you have the following things in your life: (Place an X under your answer to each question)	Not at all	A little	A lot	Not Sure
a.	Love and support from my family				
b.	Positive family communication				
c.	Support from an adult role model				
d.	A caring neighbourhood atmosphere				
e.	A caring school atmosphere				
f.	Parents involved in my education (eg. help with homework)				
g.	Family boundaries – Rules, expectations, and consequences of breaking rules are clear;				
h.	School boundaries – Rules, expectations, and consequences of breaking rules are clear;				
i.	Friends who have a positive influence on me;				
j.	My parents/guardians have high expectations of me;				
k.	My teachers have high expectations of me;				
l.	I participate in voluntary activities				
m.	I participate in youth sports, clubs, or organizations;				
n.	I participate in community activities or cultural events;				
o.	Opportunities to achieve my goals				

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22. Where do you go when you need help?

_____

_____

23. Why do you go there?

_____

Thank-you for your participation in this survey!

Appendix B
Probes used in Focus Groups

The following are examples of probes used in the focus groups:

Can you tell me more about that?

Who has an experience different from what is being shared?

Who has experiences similar to what is being shared?

How can this experience be explained? What was happening there?

What did you do next?

How did you respond?

How did this experience make you feel?

What other questions can be asked about this experience?

How do your experiences relate to/differ from other girls in the group?

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