# Resistance as desire: Reconfiguring the "at-risk girl" through critical, girl-centred participatory action research

by

Elicia Loiselle
B.A., Queen's University, 2007

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Supervisory Committee

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**Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Sandrina de Finney (School of Child and Youth Care)
**Supervisor**

Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw (School of Child and Youth Care)
**Departmental Member**

# Abstract

**Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Sandrina de Finney, School of Child and Youth Care
**Supervisor**
Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, School of Child and Youth Care
**Departmental Member**

This thesis is based on Project Artemis, a critical, girl-centred participatory action research (PAR) project designed as part of an evaluation of Artemis Place, an alternative education program serving "at-risk" girls in Victoria, BC. Nine Artemis Place students between the ages of 15 and 18 worked alongside me as co-researchers to investigate how Artemis Place has affected their lives. Our research also explored girl co-researchers' schooling experiences more broadly and the structural inequities they experience across the multiple contexts of their lives. Our process was rooted in a critical, participatory, collaborative framework, which aimed to investigate, problematize, and address (through social action) the complex forces shaping girls' experiences of marginalization. We used arts-based methods such as photovoice, graffiti walls, journaling and participatory video to cycle through the iterative phases of PAR: exploration/data collection, critical reflection/analysis, and action. We produced a documentary film as our primary research dissemination tool. In this thesis, I undertake my own analysis of our collective research to do a deep reading of girls' resistances to "at-risk" constructions of girlhood, in order to understand their negotiations of the complex forces shaping their daily realities. I complicate the concept of resistance using a hybridized feminist-poststructural (Davies, 2000) and desire-based (Tuck, 2010) framework to explore the ways girls' resistances are produced through flows of desire – creative and productive force – that disrupt, exceed, (re)configure, and/or (re)code "girl" and "risk." I argue that tracing the "desire flows" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and reconfigurations produced in/through our critical research process, is an important, political move toward sustaining alternative figurations of girlhood. As such, this thesis contributes promising, ethical/affirmative/political possibilities for understanding the complexities of girls' lives and for engaging alongside them in feminist research, praxis, and activism for social justice.

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# Acknowledgements

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# Prologue

Question 1: *Why me?*

As if to remind me of the path I traveled here
to this place
where curiosity is a privilege I enact
within the walls of stale buildings
that house the ideas of too few
obscure the realities of too many
As if to remind me of the path I traveled here
to this place
I feel an unrelenting clawing in my gut
and
I picture the dirty fingernails on the small hands of my girl self
Scratching at my insides as though across a chalk board
producing the penetrating sound of pain I cannot seem to close my ears to
Nails tear unapologetically through the tidy lessons of girlhood etched in white
Making messy and illegible
that which was taught with so unquestionable a claim to truth
that it seemed incontestable
And
when the dust settles around that chalk outline of the "good" girl
There appear silenced herstories
scrawled in a cadence of strength and desperation between the lines of
sugar and spice and everything/nice girls keep their knees together and never speak out of /turn that frown upside down
Herstories trying to rid themselves of the shame of living in the shadow of the good – white – girl,
trying to write into existence a girl who does not have define herself through damaging dichotomies:
tease or whore? smart or pretty? spit or swallow?
Swallow
Swallow words too often, swallow pride too often, swallow desire too often
But not always
Never always
And eventually not often
and that's this path

the beginning and the middle, still moving

Question 2: *Why them?*

They would not be contained
Their bodies and minds wanted to resist it
even if they couldn't quite put their finger on what *it* was
Why were they so *fucking* angry?
Didn't matter
no one seemed to care
because education is a well oiled machine that stops for nothing and no one
Not for poverty, not for sexism, not for racism, and certainly not for girls who want to learn
Not for girls whose minds and mouths are too big, too loud, too open, too demanding, too much of a disturbance
So they were - they are - bound involuntarily to labels that mark them liabilities,
Make them disposable:
"at-risk", "high risk", "disordered", "delinquent", "uncontrollable"
They are pushed out of the machine
but it's their own damn fault right?
For being girls who rebel, refuse, resist – dissenters, disturbers, disillusioned

Question 3: *Why us?*

It was serendipitous
The kind of serendipity turned synergy
that emerges
in the space between one herstorical, present, ever-shaping moment
and the next
A space bridged by relationship
A convergence of paths that mark the beginning
of a road too seldom traveled
When I connects with Them
and fumbling toward
Some ever shifting version of
We
Threaded together through
some common understanding of pain
common belief in love
common desire for change

We
move in and out of unison through cycles of knowledge production
bound to circles of lives
of girls' lives
We
endeavour to speak our individual and collective selves
into existence
through a critical language of resistance
that will give this moment the power
to revise the next
We
use our bodies, not to fulfill the requirements
of our good girl assignments
but to resist, demand, act
acting out a new performance of girl
a nuanced performance of girl
that demands
a nuanced understanding of and from the world

# Introduction

This thesis is based on Project Artemis, a critical, girl-centred participatory action research (PAR) project designed as part of an evaluation of a girls' alternative education program called Artemis Place. Located in downtown Victoria, BC, Artemis Place works to "successfully support the most at-risk girls in our community as they transform their lives."[1] It is a cozy and welcoming space that includes: a big kitchen that serves as a central gathering space; two counselling offices; an academic room equipped with computers, tables, art supplies, and numerous pieces of girls' art work on display; and, a large group room with comfy couches. The program offers life skills programming, individual and group counselling, and individualized academic plans with one-on-one support. Nine Artemis Place students between the ages of 15 and 18 worked alongside me as co-researchers to investigate how Artemis Place has affected their lives. Our research[2] also explored girls' schooling experiences more broadly and the intersecting structural inequities they negotiate across the multiple contexts of their lives (all of the girls had been alienated by the mainstream school system, all were living in poverty, and most had some sort of involvement with the child welfare system). Our research was rooted in a critical, participatory, collaborative framework, which aimed to investigate, problematize, and address (through social action) the complex forces shaping girls' experiences of marginalization. Our research team used arts-based methods such as photovoice, graffiti walls, journaling and participatory video to cycle through the iterative phases of PAR: exploration/data collection, critical reflection/analysis, and action. Focusing on participatory video as our primary arts-based

[1] http://www.artemisplace.org/Artemisplace.org/Artemis%20Place.html
[2] Throughout this thesis I refer to Project Artemis as "our" study/research etc., meaning that it is the collective, collaborative work of myself and my nine co-researchers.
[3] http://blip.tv/the-artemis-effect-when-girls-talk-back/the-artemis-effect-when-girls-talk-back-entire-film-2480137

research method and dissemination tool, we produced a documentary film called The Artemis Effect: When Girls Talk Back, which we have screened for diverse audiences and is available online. [3]

*Background of the Study*

In August 2008, I was invited by Lisa Ellis, Executive Director of Artemis Place, to assist with program evaluation activities over the 2008/09 school year by conducting my MA research as a participatory evaluation with the girls the agency serves. This invitation was extended to me after I was recommended by Dr. Sandrina de Finney (who was an Artemis Place board member and is my MA supervisor) and Dr. Sibylle Artz (who has a long term research relationship with the program and is a professor in my MA program). These recommendations were based on: my interest in participatory action research (PAR) as a praxis of social justice; my experience in youth work, activism, and community development; my alignment with many of the core values of Artemis Place; and, my interest in doing a practicum placement with the program. Lisa and I were in agreement that it would be integral for me to develop relationships of (relative) trust with the girls prior to beginning the research process. A practicum placement provided an excellent opportunity to do so.

In September 2008 I began spending two to three days per week at Artemis Place as a practicum student, facilitating life skills groups and art sessions, providing additional academic support and informal counselling, and participating in the daily activities of the program

[3] http://blip.tv/the-artemis-effect-when-girls-talk-back/the-artemis-effect-when-girls-talk-back-entire-film-2480137

(engaging in conversation, cooking, tidying, grocery shopping, outings etc.). I also attended weekly staff meetings.

In February 2009 I did recruitment for our PAR study over two weeks, holding two group information sessions (described in Chapter 2). We subsequently began a five month research process that culminated in June 2009 with a community screening of and dialogue about our documentary film. Those in attendance included: youth service providers, academic researchers, teachers, school system administrators, funders, parents, community members, and Artemis Place students, staff, and board members. In the two years following our research, various configurations of our research team members have continued to disseminate our film and findings through presentations, workshops, and publications.

*On My Multiple Locations*

I am a White, queer, woman-identified, feminist activist. I am also an adult, a youth worker, and a graduate student. My personal experiences growing up "girl", and my re-storying of those experiences as I gain access to alternative, critical knowledge, inform how I locate(d) myself (in multiple and shifting ways) as a co-researcher in Project Artemis. My own critical consciousness has been shaped by my academic grounding in feminist and queer scholarship, as well as my experience in youth and feminist grassroots organizing, which have provided me access to praxis frameworks that explore the complexities of power as it "operates to form us" (Davies, 2000). As a co-researcher positioned very differently than the rest of the research team, a significant part of my contribution was to introduce these analytical tools that could help us deepen our understandings of the structural inequities girls/we were negotiating and researching. These theoretical lenses also inform the ways in which I attended to power in our research space.

Later, in the Methodology chapter of this thesis, I explore some of the tensions I experienced in naming, unpacking, and working through/with how dominant power structures position me in relation to the girls and in relation to this thing called "research."

While my complex motivations for engaging in this collaborative project were primarily grounded in my personal investment in advocating for social justice with and for girls, I also had particular requirements to meet for, and significant benefits to gain from, my Master of Arts degree. At times I was resentful of being bound to the institution of academia; at other times I was glad to be working within the institution to challenge its hegemonic structures through critical participatory action research (PAR); and, most of the time I wondered about our ability to effectively do the latter when our work is still marginalized by the tight discursive grip "traditional" research has on academic legitimacy.

Despite my "adult outsider" position in this research, I found my used-to-be-girl self compelled by and deeply engaged in the girls' experiences, our analyses of normative girlhood discourses that serve to constrain and exclude, and their/our multiple resistances to these structures. Although it was important for me to communicate to the team how I was making meaning of our research, it was difficult for me to articulate to them reflections that were at once intellectual, embodied, past, present, and future. The only way I was able to express this in a tangible way was to put it into a spoken word piece that I wrote and shared with the girls. I offer this piece, as the prologue and epilogue to this thesis, as encouragement to (PAR) researchers to experiment with multiple and creative forms of engaging their complex and multiple selves in and through the research process.

*What This Thesis Does*

This thesis contributes critical knowledge about the realities of girls labelled "at-risk." I write through a layering of feminist analyses with the intention that each chapter will add texture and deeper engagement with the complex lives of the girls in our study. Using a hybridized feminist poststructural and desire-based analytical framework, drawing on (re)workings (Tuck 2010; Tuck 2009b) of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conceptualization of desire, I analyze girls' negotiations and reconfigurations of "at-risk" girlhood that emerged in our data and collective analyses. I undertake this thesis as an ethical commitment to account for the complexities of girls' experiences, perspectives, and knowledges, which are deeply contextual and always in flux. It is my hope that our research and this thesis can contribute critical perspectives on girlhoods and feminisms across diverse contexts and communities doing social justice praxis with/alongside girls as complex producers of critical (and mediated) knowledge and social change.

*Thesis Overview*

In Chapter 1: Literature Review, I offer a brief review of the critical girlhood studies literature that informed this study and to which this study contributes. In particular I explicate and problematize the discourses constituting normative and "at risk" girlhoods within contexts of dominant neoliberalism. The review of this literature provides a framing for my analysis, in Chapters 4-6, of girls' complex negotiations of these discourses and their effects.

Chapter 2: Methodology delineates how we developed and used a critical, girl-centred, multi-method, participatory action research (PAR) methodology. To honour the collaborative ethic through which we conducted our research, I integrate much of a book chapter I co-authored

with two of my co-researchers (Loiselle, Taylor and Donald, forthcoming), as a means of offering a multi-vocal and, therefore, more rich picture of our research process.

In Chapter 3: Analytical Framework, I describe how I undertook my individual analysis for this thesis to do a deep reading of girls' resistance in our collective analysis. I also explicate how I draw on the concept of desire to complicate and extend the feminist poststructural analysis (Butler, 2004; Davies, 2000; Davies, Browne, Gannon et al, 2006; McLaren, 2004) that informed my understanding of our methodology. Specifically, I explore how the concept of desire as articulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and reworked by Tuck (2010, 2009b), offers a theoretical tool that pushes at/beyond the limits of subjectivity in ways that work alongside my feminist poststructuralist orientation. I employ this hybridized framework to better account for the complexities of girls' negotiations/resistances that emerge in our data as (simultaneously) discursive, generative, creative, affective and embodied.

My analysis is divided into three chapters, each exploring a different but interrelated thematic assemblage through the analytical framework outlined in Chapter 3:

In Chapter 4, I undertake a deep reading of "stereotypes", a theme that featured prominently in our collective analysis. I analyze how girls understand, negotiate, reproduce, and resist the categories of "risk" and normative constructions of "girl" through which their subjectivities are constituted and their bodies intervened upon. Through three themes, "crazy", "sluts" and "liars", I attend not only to the discursive constraints that close off possibilities for girls to become other than "at risk", but also analyze for the ruptures/resistances where possibility – desire – produces something new.

In Chapter 5, I analyze girls' relationships to and tensions with feminist subjectivities, analyses, and modes of resistance to understand how feminisms emerge as both sites of exclusion and possibility in our data. Within this broader theme of feminism, I analyze the theme of "community" that emerged in our collective analyses to explore the complex interplay of neoliberal individualism and feminist collective politics that shapes girls' understandings of community and interdependence as the foundation of individual/educational success.

Finally, in Chapter 6, through the themes "Desire as satire" and "Becoming other/becoming hero", I follow a line of flight in my analysis, moved by data that shifted an ordinary moment of transcribing into a moment of "ordinary affect" (Stewart, 2007) – laughter, levity, and spaciousness. I analyze a conversation in which the girls and I brainstormed themes and concepts for our documentary film. I explore the ways in which this conversation produced (and continues to produce with each reading) an affective/performative queering of the limited girlhood subjectivities that emerged in other parts of our research.

Collectively, these chapters explicate how a hybridized feminist poststructural/desire-based framework provides a "thirding of the dichotomized categories of reproduction and resistance" (Tuck, 2009b, p. 420) that opens promising, ethical/affirmative/political possibilities (Braidotti, 2009) for understanding the complexities of girls' lives and for engaging alongside them in feminist research, praxis, and activism for social justice.

# Chapter 1: Literature Review

In this chapter, I offer a brief review of critical girlhood studies literature that informed this study and to which study findings contribute important knowledge. In particular I explicate and problematize the discourses constituting normative and "at risk" girlhoods within contexts of dominant neoliberalism. The review of this literature provides a framing for my analytical framework and the analysis I present in Chapters 3-6, which explore girls' complex negotiations and reconfigurations of these discourses. The growing body of literature in critical girlhood studies works to explicate the ways in which "girl" is a contested category that is deeply contextual and socially constructed through multiple and dispersed structural forces. This scholarship, as well as the research presented in this thesis, render visible the complex ways girls negotiate social anxieties and contradictions "at the nexus of competing claims about their bodies, identities, social locations, and political and economic roles" (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011, p. 71).

Over the past two decades, a growing body of critical girlhood studies scholarship has delineated the ways in which girlhood in neoliberal, Euro-western contexts has come under increased surveillance and regulation via modes of governmentality (de Finney, Loiselle, and Dean, 2011; Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2007; Jiwani, Steenbergen, and Mitchell, 2006), which Foucault explicates as the linking of the governance of the state to self governance (e.g. actions, thoughts, and behaviours) in order to produce the ideal citizen subject (Foucault, 1991). That is, the ideal neoliberal "girl" citizen is produced through an intensified scrutiny over and investment in her future as inextricably linked with the future of the state so that "both actual young women and the symbolic value of girlhood...have come to stand for a number of hopes and concerns

about late modernity" (Harris, 2004). Grounded in patriarchal logics, "the neoliberal incitement of individualism, rational choice, and self realization bumps up against discourses of femininity creating contradictory and complex positions for girls" (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005, p. 7). Harris (2004) explicates how such individualizing girlhood subjectivities are produced through mutually constituting discourses of success and failure, which take hold in binary constructions of the "can do" and the "at risk" girl respectively. In the following sections I briefly delineate the complex ways these discourses function in order to contextualize the forces shaping the lives of girls in Project Artemis.

*The "Can-do" Girl*

The "can do" girl is the (white, middle class, heterosexual) self-actualizing young woman of the "new competitive meritocracy" (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2007), planning and executing a successful trajectory for her education and future employment, bolstered by her steady consumption of the products and representations that appropriately gender her aspirations and achievements through discourses of hetero-femininity. The "can do" girl is deeply embedded in and constituted through mainstream constructions of "girl power." With subversive origins, "grrrl power" initially emerged out of the Riot Grrrl movement, which involved mostly middle class, white, queer identified girls' active feminist resistance to dominant gender expectations through DIY punk subculture. However, in the mid 1990s it was appropriated and commodified, most famously by the Spice Girls, and has since proliferated in multiple and dispersed iterations (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011; Harris, 2004; Riordan, 2001). Taft (2004) outlines four interconnected "girl power" discourses deployed to shape contemporary girlhood subjectivities under neoliberalism: anti-feminism – "girl power" as "the non-political, non-threatening

alternative to feminism...emphasizing beauty and appearance"; postfeminism – the "claim that girls have attained all the power they could ever want, and there is nothing left to be done"; individual power – "reflects the ideologies of individualism and personal responsibility" while negating social systems and institutions; and consumer power – "confines girls' social power to their purchasing power" (p. 71-74). All of these discourses are inextricably linked and mutually constituting.

McRobbie (2007) asserts that the neoliberal production of "can do" girls (or as she calls them "top girls") is achieved through the culturally ubiquitous "post-feminist masquerade", which serves to reinforce patriarchal dominance through the "post-feminist sexual contract" where "new" hetero-femininities are produced as sites of individual choice and power taken up by empowered/ powerful girls and women. She explains that post-feminist discourse is so successful precisely because it does not dismiss feminism altogether; rather, it acknowledges feminism as a movement with historical utility that achieved its goal and is now irrelevant to girls of today who have the world at their fingertips. Feminism is effectively rendered obsolete under the guise of "gender equality." McRobbie (2007) elaborates that:

> the post-feminist masquerade is a strategy or device for the re-securing of patriarchal law and masculine hegemony... the hyper-femininity of the masquerade which would seemingly re-locate women back inside the terms of traditional gender hierarchies, by having her wear spindly stilettos and 'pencil' skirts does not in fact mean entrapment since it is now a matter of choice rather than obligation. (p. 723)

"Girl power" is thus specifically gendered power that does not threaten male dominance because it takes hold through an intensified investment in dominant constructions of hetero-femininity, which are also tied to an essentializing discourse of vulnerability. That is, the production of the ideal "girl" citizen comes with the concomitant social anxiety over keeping "can do" girls on a

successful track, evidenced by the proliferation of interventions targeting white, middle class girls and concerned with their confidence and sense of self worth. McRobbie (2007) notes that "these female individualisation processes require that young women become important to themselves. In times of stress, the young woman is encouraged to seek therapy, counselling or guidance. She is thus an intensively managed subject of post-feminist, gender-aware biopolitical practices of new governmentality" (p. 723). This includes demands on girls to be consumers, where shopping and "retail therapy" are coded through contradictory gendered discourses of irrationality and success, promising empowerment through spending power that produces girls as capitalist subjects. The struggle to participate appropriately in consumption as a marker of normative girlhood while living in contexts of poverty produces tensions and contradictions in the lives of poor and working class girls, including those in our study.

Noted for bringing discourses of girls' struggles into the realm of popular culture is Mary Pipher's 2004 book, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls*. The book characterized the "problem" facing white, middle class girls as the loss of their authentic selves as they try desperately to navigate a patriarchal world. The book is credited in critical girlhood studies for locating the struggles and experiences of girls within dominant contexts of gender inequities. However, it is also heavily critiqued on multiple grounds (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005; Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011; Harris, 2004). Such critiques include: that Pipher's book individualizes the solution to structural inequities, suggesting that in order to overcome such struggles girls need to work more on themselves through therapy, programmes, and support; that it obscures the complexity of girls' negotiations

of their realities by fixing them as passive "victims"; and, that it reproduces the erasure of difference across girlhoods:

> [Reviving Ophelia] discourse builds on the already prevailing image that girls who are deserving of social sympathy and concern are those who are white and middle-class. It presents girls who due to their racialized and class positions are actually comparatively quite privileged, as hapless victims. In doing so, it further marginalizes girls who are socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005).

Thus, these mutually constituting discourses of "girl power" and vulnerability that produce "can do" girl subjectivity work through meritocratic discourses to naturalize dominant whiteness and propagate an era of gender equality under the guise of a "post racial" (Fine and Ruglis, 2009) and "post feminist" (McRobbie, 2007) humanist social order. As such, that "can do" girls are disproportionately white cannot be linked to racism, but is instead tied to discourses that essentialize the laziness, inability, immorality, dysfunction, criminality etc. of unsuccessful "others." The construction of the "model minority" evidences this, exemplified by Beyoncé Knowles – a young, powerful, Black woman and neoliberal capitalist success story who just released a single called "Run the World (Girls)." Some of the lyrics include:

> Who run the world? Girls!...This goes out to all my girls/ That's in the club rocking the latest/ Who will buy it for themselves and get more money later... My persuasion can build a nation/Endless power, our love we can devour/You'll do anything for me... Boy you know you love it/How we're smart enough to make these millions/Strong enough to bare the children/Then get back to business[4]

This song has been critiqued for presenting a false victory anthem for girls' world domination (nineteenpercent, 2011). It reproduces dominant discourses of hetero-femininity as "power" (shopping/capitalism, "persuasion"/manipulation), while simultaneously erasing the socio-political disparities that shape the bleak material conditions of many (particularly poor, racialized, queer) girls' and women's lives. Beyoncé, as a powerful icon, has been critiqued in

[4] http://www.beyonceonline.com

many critical, sociological, and feminist online forums. For instance, M. Dot (2009), guest blogger on the Racialicious[5] blog site, explicates the contradictory workings of "girl power" in Beyoncé's songs and star status:

> I am fascinated by a light skinned, middle class Black woman from the Houston suburbs who sings about needing a soldier, who she could upgrade, so that he can put a ring on it, and if he likes her he can put her in his video phone. Conversely, why is a woman worth tens of millions of dollars singing about needing a baller? I'm intrigued by this binary of success that allows one Black woman at a time to be a megastar, with the general prerequisite being that she is light skinned and talented, and while all the rest [of Black woman performers] remain pretty marginalized.

"Girl power" discourses, such as those promoted by Beyoncé's music and image, impose a whitening of representations of racialized girls in order to attain "can do" status. Meanwhile, "unsuccessful" poor, queer, and racialized girls are seen as simply not possessing the individual resources to overcome their circumstances, essentializing disordered behaviours and consumption to minoritized individuals and communities – all of which takes hold in the "can do" girl's failed counter-part, the "at-risk" girl.

*The "At-risk" Girl*

As I explicated in the previous section, under patriarchal neoliberalism all girls' bodies are constructed as always already vulnerable and risky, holding only a tenuous grasp on appropriate, neoliberal, hetero-femininity. However, the "at-risk" girl is specifically demarcated by her "otherness" to the ideal "can do" girl. She is defined via risk factors that are individualized so that her "otherness" can be linked to poor personal choices. Her resultant failure to achieve educational and economic success can be blamed on her family and

[5] Racialicious is a blog that examines the intersections of race and popular culture: http://www.racialicious.com/

community, rather than on the systemic racism, classism, homophobia, ableism, etc, that dispossess her of education and employment opportunities (Harris, 2004; Fine & Ruglis, 2009). Harris (2004) argues:

> the problems of the at-risk are often seen as endemic to the communities they come from, and individual families and cultural groupings are held to blame for the lack of success of their youth. Incompetent parenting is often erroneously associated with unsafe neighbourhoods, which are in turn linked to crime, poverty and an ethnic demographic...At-risk and risk-taking youth are then frequently seen as inheriting bad attitudes, which trickle down through their communities. (p. 25-26)

The "at-risk" girl is produced through/as failure of this new neoliberal girlhood that defines the future girl – she is not the (white, middle class, heterosexual, feminine) image of the future of the state and as such she is constructed as having no future. Further, her body and behaviour are rendered inherently suspect, and are scrutinized through the lenses of risk and deviance.

The intensified surveillance and regulation of girls through modes of governmentality and the concomitant social anxiety over the "crisis in girlhood" in the 21st century has shifted the discursive terrain of "girl violence" from the poor, racialized "bad girls" frequently depicted in the 1990s (for instance, "gang girls") to the bullying behaviours of white, middle-class girls (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2004; Ringrose, 2006). The latter, termed "relational aggression" in contrast to the physical aggression attributed to boys, was documented in best-selling books such as *Queen Bees and Wannabes* (Wiseman, 2002) and *The Secret Lives of Girls* (Lamb, 2001) and shifted public focus so that "the bad girl of the early 2000s was White, middle class, and suburban and had a promising future" (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004).

Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) draw attention to the discrepancies between media attention on middle-class White girls, and the reality in which poor and racialized girls experienced greater consequences for increased public attention on "girl violence", which has

taken hold in stricter criminal justice practices: "...girls who were "acting out" in school or in the home were being punished formally. While it is likely that all girls were at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice at a faster rate than boys, it is clear that girls of colour were unable to slip out of the purview of formal social control mechanisms" (p. 54).

Poor and working-class and girls' responses to injustice are systematically (re)coded via normative discourses of girlhood that regulate resistant or dissenting behaviour through gendered and classed discourses of hetero-femininity (Charlton, 2007; Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz , 2009; Reitsma-Street, 2004). Through processes of "binary division and branding" (Foucault, 1977), social problems are (re)inscribed onto the bodies of "at-risk" girls, so that their anger and aggression toward the structural inequities they experience can be designated as deviance and/or disorder and their bodies and lives can be intervened upon (de Finney, Dean, Loiselle, and Saraceno, 2011; Sparks, 2002). Reitsma-Street (2004) argues that violence and aggression in the lives of girls cannot be understood without critical examination of "the trend towards restrictive welfare and punitive justice policies that increases the vulnerability of girls to violence especially if living in low income communities" (p. 115). In the absence of such systemic analyses in public discourse, individualizing "girl in crisis" scripts produce wide scale social anxiety, marking girls' "risky" bodies as in need of intervention/correction (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011). Further, many of these interventions are directed toward changing girls' individual and interpersonal behaviours, rather than supporting girls to engage in critical exploration, analyses, and advocacy from their own complex experiences of and perspectives on structural violence.

The perception of girl violence as a prevalent social problem thus functions as a mechanism of control policing girls' gender and sexual roles (Reitsma-Street, 2004). That is,

aggression and violence are ascribed differently on the bodies of girls than on boys, and while most youth violent crime is committed by boys, the preoccupation with girl violence reflects moral panic over the perversion of white, middle class hetero-femininity displayed through girls' aggressive behaviour. Further, access to dominant narratives of appropriate hetero-femininity is already compromised and/or precluded for girls who are positioned as poor, queer, and/or racialized. "[P]ortrayals of girls as prone to psychological illness...disguise other possible origins for depression, including sexual abuse, devaluation of voice, and unrealistic expectations for appearance, behavior, and life choices" (Sparks, 2002, p. 31). An extension of this analysis is also necessary, so that gender is analyzed in intersection with class, race, ability, sexuality, etc. to examine how different differences constitute specific and complex marginalizing effects for girls within a white hetero-patriarchal capitalist society. That is, "other possible origins of depression" and other diagnoses cannot be understood outside of the systemic violence girls experience, nor outside the sites of privilege they access that mitigate the effects of that violence.

*Heterofemininity, Sexualities, and Desire*

As I explored earlier, neoliberal girlhood is constituted through contradictory discourses of appropriate hetero-femininity and hyper-sexualization (Renold, 2008). While Renold and Ringrose (2008) affirm the importance of McRobbie's (2007) analysis of the "postfeminist masquerade" for critical girlhood studies scholarship, they also point to its inadequacy in accounting for the complex ways girls in their empirical studies "were subverting, undermining or overtly resisting and challenging the ubiquitous hegemonic heterosexual matrix" (p. 315). They draw attention to the problematic extrapolation of analyses of media and cultural representations onto analyses of "critical consumption at the level of [girls'] everyday lived

lives" (p. 315). To this end, Renold and Ringrose (2008) explore their ethnographic data to understand how the discourses that produce the "postfeminist masquerade" are shaped by and enacted through discourses of class and race and are negotiated by girls in their daily lives. They write: "we then want to move forward toward a critical engagement with the micro complexities that reveal girls as at once reinscribing and disrupting the postfeminist terrain that demands hypersexualized femininities" (Renold & Ringrose, 2008, p. 315). The analysis of sexuality I present in this thesis across the themes in Chapters 4-6, explores girls' everyday negotiations of cultural, socio-political discourses and media representations as they shape their realities across their specific/multiple contexts. Thus, the rest of this section explores the discursive constitutions of girlhood sexuality that frame this analysis.

Through dominant, Western discourses, the sexuality of girls and women is automatically rendered suspect and in need of social regulation. McClelland and (2008a) discuss the medical, psychological and cultural pathologization of female sexuality and point to the specificity of girl sexuality as it is differently othered:

> Although [through feminist disruptions of dominant discourses] adult women have been somewhat successful in resuscitating a discourse of sexual excess for them/ourselves, the sexuality of teen women has remained more securely locked within a judgemental box that treats female teenage sexuality as dangerous, risky, and excessive – or as victimization. (p. 85)

While McClelland and Fine (2008a) conceptualize the discourse of desire as absent in girls' lives, they simultaneously articulate a project of moving beyond "what lacks and what is lost for young women and their sexual selves" (p. 85). This shift away from lack toward recognition of girls' productions of sexuality is explored in further depth in Chapter 3 where I explicate desire as a useful conceptual tool for my analysis of resistance. At the same time that my analysis of

our findings explores girls' alternative figurations of their sexualities, Chapter 4 also unpacks the complex ways girls understand and negotiate the discursive constraints that take hold through the prevalence and effects of the label "slut" in their lives.

The discursive production of the slut emerged in our data as heavily implicated in the regulation of girlhood sexuality. In their work exploring young women and feminism, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2000) have noted that "*more and more women own* bitch *(and what it means to be released from the please like me gene),* cunt *(both the complex odiferous body part and the wise badass woman) and* slut *(the woman whose sexuality is owned by no one but herself)* [italics in original]" (p. 52). While the reclamation of violent, sexist labels as a political feminist manoeuvre has proliferated alongside (perhaps even bolstering) the "post-feminist masquerade", the question of who has access to the politics of reclamation remains largely unexplored in writings by mainstream feminist writers like Baumgardner and Richards. Importantly, the erasure of racialization in slut re-appropriation discourse has been rendered visible in intersectional feminist critiques of the recent groundswell of Slut Walks across North America and Western Europe. The first Slut Walk in April, 2011 was founded by two young women in Toronto in response to the Toronto Police Department after one of their officers was quoted as telling a class at York University that women could avoid being sexually assaulted by avoiding dressing like sluts. Vancouver activist Harsha Walia (2011) eloquently comments:

> Slutwalk itself consistently refuses any connection to feminism and fixates solely around liberal questions of individual choice – the palatable "I can wear what I want" feminism that is intentionally devoid of an analysis of power dynamics. Historically, this has come at a great cost to low-income women and women of colour who bear the brunt of institutionalized sexism – from lack of access to childcare and denial of reproductive justice to stratification in precarious low-wage work and disproportionate criminalization.

It is thus necessary to attend to the ways slut discourse is embedded in whiteness and defined through and against dominant, white, middle class, female morality:

> Hegemonic femininity figures prominently into moral panics because what is at stake are gender, racial, sexual and class status quos. Futhermore, it is integral to patriarchy and white supremacy as a way of generating a heroic masculinity aimed at the "protection" (meaning control) of white girls and women. (Batacharya, 2010, p. 48)

As such, my analysis of slut in Chapter 4 explores girls' understandings of the contradictions and limitations imposed on their lives through the construction of appropriate (white, middle class) hetero-femininity.

Our study also explored how girls negotiate discourses of girlhood under dominant and alternative educational paradigms and, in particular, how their positioning as "drop outs" or "girls who go to an alternative school" excludes them from dominant discourses of success and marks them as "problematic." In the following section I briefly review salient critical literature that explores the systemic educational disenfranchisement of poor and racialized youth and girls.

*The Educational Disenfranchisement of "At-risk" Girls*

As a participatory evaluation of an alternative education program, our research is also situated within literature on educational disenfranchisement. Fine and colleagues have undertaken extensive research investigating the disenfranchisement of poor and racialized youth from public schools (e.g. Fine & Rosenberg, 1983; Fine 1995; Fine & Powell, 2001; Fine & Torre, 2004; Fine, Torre, Burns & Payne, 2007; Fine & Ruglis, 2009). She articulates how the individualized categories of "risk" I elaborated earlier function through "drop out" discourse:

> An adolescent may be "at-risk" if she exhibits high absenteeism, has been retained in grade, performs poorly in class, indicates a "pre-violent" disposition, is pregnant, has a

> learning disability, lives in a single-mother household...[T]he notion "at risk" inside the drop-out literature ...offers a deceptive image of an isolatable and identifiable group of students who, by virtue of some personal characteristic, are not likely to graduate. (Fine, 1995, p. 88)

She goes on to analyze the ways in which institutionalized racism, classism, and sexism are effectively obscured through such individualizing labels: "They reproduce existing ideologies, shave off alternative frames, and recommend as "natural" those programs of reform which reproduce and sediment class, race, and gender stratifications" (Fine, 1995, p.89). The experiences of the "at-risk" girl sketched above by Fine resemble some of the stories girls in our study tell about why mainstream schools did not work for them – that their particular contexts made it difficult for them to attend regularly, and that they required extra help understanding their school work. These stories are about how the particular contexts (poverty, involvement in the child welfare system, different learning needs and goals etc.) that produced barriers to their success were simultaneously erased and exacerbated/reproduced by the white, middle-class structures of mainstream education that are rooted in neoliberal meritocracy. Our study also confirms the finding in critical education literature that schools silence and exile dissenting student bodies that challenge dominant discourses of the appropriate student and resist the authority of the school as a regulatory institution (Fine, 1991, in Brown & Rodriguez, 2008, p. 2).

According to Brown and Rodriguez (2008), the largely quantitative body of existing literature on high school attrition consists of studies investigating the "dropout problem" from *either* the individual *or* the institutional perspective. Where the former simply investigates correlations between so-called "risk factors" (race, class etc.) and dropout rates, the latter investigates correlations between dropout and family background, school size, location, policies,

practices etc. While also identified in the literature is the methodological challenge of separating the individual from institutional factors, Brown and Rodriguez assert that such a project of disentanglement creates an artificial boundary that negates the complexity of social relations co-constructing high school dropout. For example, the authors assert that "the 'effect' of being poor and Latino on dropping out of school cannot be isolated from the ways in which schools respond to poor, Latino students" (p. 2).

Canadian drop-out statistics evidence the blatant erasure of the socio-historical and systemic processes through which some youth are underserved and alienated from mainstream education. For instance, the Statistics Canada's (2010) Labour Force Survey emphasizes the finding that Aboriginal youth had much higher drop-out rates than non-Aboriginal youth. However, no links are made between these findings and contexts of neo-colonialism, thus marking Indigenous youth as inherently "at-risk" and/or incapable and erasing white supremacy in educational policy, curriculum, and practices. Brown and Rodriguez argue for a framework that re-constructs dropout "risk factors" (like race, class and gender) as unstable, socially-produced categories, rather than fixed and/or essential identity categories that predetermine academic success or failure.

Nicholson and Artz (2008) argue that standardized educational processes are clearly implicated in the alienation of students in British Columbia who do not perform well on standardized tests, as schools devote their energies to those students "who are likely to help the school meet its performance standards" (p. 13) Tuck et al.'s (2008) study demonstrates that poor and racialized youth who experience schools as alienating institutions, and therefore do not thrive academically in such settings, are often those pushed out and encouraged to opt for

alternatives. This reality of (poor, racialized) youth seeking alternatives to the oppressive environments of mainstream schools represents a key theme consistently articulated by the girls at Artemis Place; however, a gendered analysis exploring the specific experiences of marginalized girls disenfranchised from mainstream school systems are absent from the critique given by Tuck et al (2008), further establishing the need for this critical, girl-centred PAR study.

Nicholson and Artz (2008) explain that the mandate that educational alternatives be provided at no extra cost means B.C. school districts must somehow, without supplementary funding, meet the needs of students who are struggling in or have been pushed out of the mainstream school system. Nicholson and Artz (2008) present a case study of the Girls Alternative Program (GAP) and Options Daycare in Victoria, BC. The case study of GAP shows that budget cuts, due to shifts in the administration of funds from the Ministry of Education to the School Districts, have meant decreases in staff that have had significant impacts on the program, such as the inability to adequately support clients. Nicholson and Artz (2008) explore how a lack of understanding by school administrators of the needs of GAP students, as well as the lack of appreciation for what GAP offers them, contributes to the under-valuing and under-funding of such needed programming. The authors contextualize such misunderstanding within a long history of education that blames individual and cultural "deficits", rather than systems, for students' academic failure. Fine and Ruglis (2009) frame a similar argument about public education in the United States:

> Educators, parents, and youth try to negotiate conditions of systemic miseducation and the scientism of high stakes testing, while ideologies about merit, deservingness, and blame drip feed into the soul, tagging some bodies as worthy and others as damaged. (p. 21)

Girl co-researchers in our study experienced and critiqued the social devaluing of themselves as failed students and of Artemis Place as a repository for "at-risk" girls. As such, girls/we shaped our social action to disrupt this systemic undervaluing and communicate how Artemis Place is important for girls in redressing the failures of the mainstream education system. Importantly, Fine (1995) notes that while alternative programs are very often found to be successful at what they do (see Proweller, 2000 as an example), they are insufficient in addressing the systemic injustices perpetrated through the public school system. For instance, they can only serve a small number of youth

> resulting in the substantial neglect of that majority of students who remain in non-alternative schools. Further, they may necessitate waivers – rather than policy change – or require psychological (often racial) "assimilation" rather than institutional transformation...All adolescents deserve and desire what are usually the conditions of "alternatives" – small, intact, and personal spaces in which to engage their peers, adults, communities, and texts. (Fine, 1995, p. 84)

Girls in Project Artemis make a similar argument in our film, emphasizing that they believe regular schools should operate more like Artemis Place and that, if that were the case, they likely would have had far more positive learning experiences throughout their educations.

Critical literature exploring high school push-out constitutes an urgent demand for educational reform that positions students as legitimate producers of knowledge who must be active partners in actions taken to bring social justice to North American school systems. The use of PAR frameworks in critical education studies (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2007; Torre, Fine et al., 2008; Tuck et al., 2008) provides a compelling example of how young people and adults can form community and work collectively to: investigate the realities of marginalized youth; critically analyze how these realities are continually (re)produced and how they are and can be resisted; and create action that engages communities in powerful processes of social

change. My own desire for such participatory, community/activist work served as the impetus for this study.

*The Need for This Study*

Critical, feminist and girlhood studies analyses of gender and sexuality are helpful in informing this project. However, girls' lives are rarely explored in feminist literature *by* girls *as* they are being constituted through intersecting discourses/forces; rather, some of the notable scholarship in the area explores these issues through retrospective interrogations of feminist scholars' girlhoods, such as those in Johnson (2002) and Vance (1984), or consist of non-participatory, non-action-oriented analyses of girlhood experiences (Renold & Ringrose, 2008; Thompson, 1990; Tolman, 1996). Further, the lack of critical, gendered analyses in the literature on educational disenfranchisement and drop-out/push-out among marginalized youth hinder understandings of the particular experiences of girls. Our study investigates the complex constructions of girlhood under dominant neoliberalism as they shape "risk" discourses and interventions across girls' schooling experiences and the multiple/intersecting contexts through which they negotiate their lives.

# Chapter 2: Methodology

Project Artemis is a critical, girl-centred participatory action research project that served as a participatory evaluation of the Artemis Place program. This research simultaneously explored girls' schooling experiences and the intersecting structural inequities they negotiate across the multiple contexts of their lives. Our critical, girl-centred PAR framework is fundamentally concerned with why girls have such limited access to the means of research and which girls are excluded to a greater extent from legitimatized knowledge production. As Griffin (2004) states, "If girls and young women have been and remain relatively invisible in most youth research, then some girls have been more invisible than others" (p.30). Our critical PAR process and practices were deliberately designed to interrogate and account for the structural barriers that have historically marginalized the critical knowledge and experience of the girls in Project Artemis and more broadly.

Before unpacking the specificities of the methodological approach the girls and I developed together, it is important to delineate how this project came about. Program evaluation was a requirement of a grant Artemis Place received from the Victoria Foundation for the 2008/09 school year. The grant provided some funds to undertake the evaluation activities. Our study was also later supported with funds from a graduate student grant provided by the Office of Community Based Research at the University of Victoria. This study was initially conceptualized by Dr. Sandrina de Finney (Artemis Place board member), Lisa Ellis (Executive Director) and I as a girl-led, formative evaluation. It was designed as an opportunity for girls to guide the direction of the program by identifying what was working and what was not working for them and to investigate if/how they experience change and/or transformation in their lives

through their participation at Artemis Place. As such, we framed some broad evaluation questions as a starting point:

- How and why did girls come to Artemis Place? Has anything changed for girls throughout their time at Artemis Place? If so, what, why, and how? How is this related to their participation at Artemis?
- What are the strengths of the program? What is working? Why?
- What are the gaps/limitations of the program? What is not working, or not working as well as it could? Why?

These questions provided a loose structure for the study. Through a collaborative research process, girl co-researchers and I generated and explored more specific questions, which are outlined later in the Research Questions section of this chapter.

Developing a critical and participatory framework for this study was important precisely because the experiences of girls who are alienated from the mainstream school system and labeled "at risk" are under-researched, particularly from their own perspectives and in their own voices. I came into my MA program with the intention to engage in participatory action research (PAR) with youth to critically and collaboratively explore their experiences and develop social action to address structural inequities in their lives. Participatory action research is a broad approach to research emerging from multiple historical roots and applications, which cannot be reduced to one definition or set of practices. A key feature of PAR is that those whose lives are studied through the research are included as co-researchers who investigate their own social conditions with the goal of developing actions for change. This methodology is grounded in the understanding that research holds transformative, emancipatory potential when used by and with marginalized communities as a tool for social change. Of course this is an idealized characterization of PAR that simplifies, if not obscures, the many tensions and challenges that

emerge precisely because the methodology is embedded in the same structural forces it is designed to investigate and change. It is precisely these tensions I want to make visible in our approach, as a way of contributing to enriching debates about YPAR and its limitations and possibilities.

As a methodological approach, PAR offered a useful framework for the Artemis Place participatory evaluation, given its ethical grounding in tenets of collaboration, transparency, and action. However, in order to account for the complexity of girls' experiences through a participatory process, it was important to nuance how we would take up PAR as a methodology. That is, PAR approaches have been (and continue to be) critiqued and re-conceptualized to attend to the erasures produced across various conceptual frameworks. For instance, feminist PAR was developed as a response to masculinist iterations of the methodology that did not adequately account for gendered structural inequities (Maguire, 2001; Maguire, 2004). Further, youth PAR has been conceptualized to name age-related barriers not considered in adult-oriented PAR studies, in order to provide youth with access to the means of research, knowledge production, and influence in policy development that directly affects their lives (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). However, both feminist PAR and youth PAR tend to inaccurately subsume "girl" under the categories of "woman" or "youth", without accounting for the specificities of age and gender inequities respectively (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011). To do research that would account for the complexities of the intersecting structural forces shaping girls' lives, we collectively constructed/negotiated our framework as a critical, girl-centred Participatory Action Research methodology. This chapter endeavours to outline our project and explore the

possibilities, challenges, implications, and tensions of this critical approach as they emerged in practice.

*The Challenges of Writing This Chapter*

The necessary non-linearity and collectivity of the PAR process makes it incredibly challenging to summarize. It would also be impossible (even with an infinite page limit) to fully detail the richness and complexity of the process as it happened, especially through the linear medium of academic writing. Our multiple, shifting perspectives on our process as a team cannot possibly be fully accounted for as I write this from my own partial perspective(s). I want *us* to write this chapter (if not this entire thesis), however, this comes into conflict with the ivory tower expectation that a grad student stake individual claims on the authorship of *her* thesis in order to prove her legitimacy as an academic researcher. In an effort to disrupt this paradigm, even in a small way, I have integrated some collective writing into this chapter. While many of my co-researchers are pursuing other paths and are not available to write with me (or are simply not interested in doing so), I have been able to write with two of the co-researchers from the team (Ruth and Lizz) about our research process for a forthcoming book chapter (Loiselle, Taylor & Donald, forthcoming). Over several months we engaged in multiple cycles of collective writing and reflection, and I have integrated much of our co-authored work into this Methodology chapter as a way of offering a deeper, more rich picture of our research process.[6] In the following section we contextualize the multiplicity of voice throughout the rest of this chapter.

[6] My co-authors, Ruth Taylor and Elizabeth Donald, gave me verbal permission to use our collective writing in my thesis.

## *Writing Collectively: Contesting Individual Claims to Knowledge*

### *Elicia, Ruth, and Lizz*[7]

To write collectively about our study, we write in a "we" voice in some sections, while in other sections our individual voices are distinguishable. The "we" voice is at once problematic and foundational to what we aim to do through our writing process. The first issue that must be addressed is that "we" is most often interpreted to stand in as representative of all voices – as consensus. First, because only three of us were able to engage in this collaborative writing process together, we cannot claim that our perspectives and reflections are representative of the seven other co-researchers in Project Artemis. Second, while we write as "we" to talk about ourselves as girls with very particular experiences of marginalization, our co-author Elicia is an adult academic researcher and does not necessarily share our specific contexts, social locations and experiences. However, it is important to us to acknowledge through "we" that our knowledge and analyses have been co-constructed throughout our research process and in the writing of this chapter.

## *The Project Artemis Team: Brief Contexts of Co-researchers' Lives*

### *Ruth, Lizz, and Elicia*

The girl co-researchers on our Project Artemis team were Ruth, Elizabeth (Lizz), Sarah, Leah, Jordanna, Ashley, Beckie, Starr, and Taylor[8] (ages 15 to 18). Our research explores our experiences as girls who have been alienated by and/or pushed out of the mainstream education system and labeled "drop outs", "at-risk", "high risk", and/or "problematic." As Fine and

[7] Excerpts from Loiselle, Taylor and Donald (forthcoming)

[8] In our ongoing discussions about informed consent, all girl co-researchers chose that they wanted their participation as co-researchers to be credited to them by first name in the dissemination of findings (e.g. screenings of our film, conference presentations, my thesis, publications, etc.).

Rosenberg (1983) state, "critical perspectives on social institutions are often best obtained from exiles, that is, persons who leave those institutions. This is perhaps why exiles' views are frequently disparaged as deviant and in some cases, conspicuously silenced" (p. 257). During the study, all of the girls were attending Artemis Place, an alternative integrated education and counselling program for marginalized girls. Many of us had been to multiple schools and alternative education programs before Artemis Place. A few of us were living independently for months or years at the time our research began. Several of us were working jobs after school and on weekends to support ourselves. Some of us were either in government care (foster care, group homes, kinship care) at the time of the research or had had different forms of involvement with the Ministry of Child and Family Development over the course of our lifetimes. We were all living in contexts of relative poverty. Seven of us identified as White (of these seven, one of us also identified as a Romanian Jew), one of us identified as part White and part Métis, one of us identified as Indigenous, and one of us did not identify her race/ethnicity. One of us identified as bisexual and one of us identified that she was also interested in boys and girls. Three girls identified as heterosexual. Other girls did not explicitly identify their sexualities. Examining the intersections of these and other complex experiences, our critical, girl-centred PAR process took shape out of our desire to speak back to and disrupt the constraining categories of "risk" that place our complex realities and perspectives under erasure.

## *Critical, Girl-centred Participatory Action Research*

### *Lizz, Ruth, Elicia*

Project Artemis is heavily informed by the growing field of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and is necessarily and inextricably bound to feminist Participatory Action

Research (FPAR). As mentioned earlier, Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is designed to place young people's perspectives at the centre of decision-making in service-provision, research and policy that directly affects them. Such participatory methodological frameworks create opportunities for young people to identify and study social problems affecting their lives and create recommendations for organizational, institutional and social change (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Sabo Flores, 2008). Feminist critiques of PAR emerged in response to the lack of gendered analysis in participatory research, the concomitant lack of analysis of participatory researchers' gendered/multiple social locations, and the erasure of feminist voices and women's realities in debates about action research (Corbett et al, 2007; Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Maguire, 1987). Thus, feminist PAR (FPAR) centres gender and intersecting inequities, endeavouring to render visible the complexities of individual and collective subjectivities and the ways power works to form them, though such work is necessarily fraught with challenges and contradictions (Corbett et al, 2007; Davies, 2000; Maguire, 2001). As noted earlier, much of the methodological literature on both YPAR and FPAR appear to subsume the category of "girl" under the arguably inadequate categories of "youth" and "women", obscuring the relevance and political import of its specificity. While we drew heavily on these existing (and shifting) YPAR and FPAR frameworks, our process also specifies and thus complexifies the conceptualization and application of participatory methodologies by/with marginalized girls.

*Lizz*

I don't think that people really take girls like us seriously. They see it like it's our fault and we just have to conform to society. It hurts and it's really not accurate. It's stuck

in people's heads that you change for society, society doesn't change for you. In Project Artemis we were talking back to that and I feel like we made people take us seriously. It was like being in a room full of people and standing up in our seat, shouting out "shut up we want to talk." It wasn't disrespectful though. It was as if we've been interrupted our whole lives and we're finally being listened to. We made that opportunity for ourselves and it was really brave of us because we're not "supposed to" share our opinions, especially being young women in a patriarchal society.

*Elicia, Ruth, Lizz*

Lizz captures how the systemic, patriarchal silencing of girls' voices necessitated the specificity of our critical, girl-centred PAR methodology so that we could explore and talk back to the inequities we experience. We enacted a critical PAR framework that allowed us to centre our experiences of being girls across the multiple contexts of our lives, while we simultaneously tried to unpack "girl" as a complex, constructed, tenuous, and contestable category. For us, this meant asking questions not only about how and why we have been labelled as "drop-outs", "at-risk", "vulnerable" etc., but also about how these discourses that construct us through and as "problems" intersect with discourses of gender (of what it means to be a "girl" – how our bodies are labelled, regulated, objectified, sexualized in very specific, gendered ways) and how gender is simultaneously produced through discourses of class and race.[9]

At the same time, a significant tension in doing gender specific inquiry (within a gender specific program) is the implicit (risk of) reifying the gender binary. Driver (2007) notes that "[e]ven feminist academic researchers have learned to translate the intensities of flesh-and-blood

[9] We tentatively include race here, though Elicia explores later in the chapter the limited ways in which we interrogated racism and whiteness

teen worlds into safely packaged knowledges. The very categories of "girl" and "boy" remain distinct and clear, erasing those who identify as both/and or neither" (Driver, 2007, p. 305). Our approach to critical, girl-centred PAR is not intended to essentialize "girl." Rather, it is intended to explore and politicize how "girl" is discursively constructed through multiple, shifting, and uneven structural forces that shape the disparate material conditions of "at-risk" girlhoods. We centre "girl" for the purpose of calling it into question, even as the repetition of "girl" in our research and writing reproduces the erasure of, for instance, transgender, gender queer, and gender non-conforming subjectivities. This tension is not easily resolved, even as the project of challenging girl as a naturalized, fixed category aligns with the project of disrupting dichotomous constructions of gender.

Within FPAR and YPAR literature, there are relatively few studies (e.g. Cahill, Arenas, Contreras, Rios-Moore & Threatts, 2004; de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011; Khanna, 2011; Lee & de Finney, 2004; McClelland & Fine, 2008b) exploring when, where, how and why girls may or may not have access to opportunities to engage in legitimized knowledge production, or how girls' intersectional subject positions are implicated in their relative access to such processes. Through Project Artemis, we sought to engage with the nuances, complexities, and contradictions of our multiple subjectivities as we explored and theorized our realities to speak back to the dominant discourses and structural inequalities that marginalize us as girls, in education systems and beyond. Lee and de Finney (2004) argue that this type of PAR should "provide space and alternative language to connect broader historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural processes to personal narratives" (p. 111). This research imperative is linked to what Torre, Fine, Stoudt & Fox (forthcoming) have explicated as a critical PAR framework.

While PAR is taken up in many different ways (some of which co-opt participation in the service of reproducing dominant discourses and "norms"), Torre et al (forthcoming) outline the distinctions of *critical* PAR:

> Rooted in notions of democracy and social justice and drawing on critical theory (feminist, critical race, queer, disability, neo-Marxist, indigenous, and/or post-structural) critical PAR is an epistemology that engages research design, methods, analyses, and products through a lens of democratic participation. Joining social movements and public science, critical PAR projects document the grossly uneven structural distributions of opportunities, resources and dignity; trouble ideological categories projected onto communities (delinquent, at risk, damaged, innocent, victim) and contest how "science" has been recruited to legitimate dominant policies and practices. (p. 2)

Critical approaches to YPAR are deeply invested in "analyz[ing] power relations through multiple axes. Thus, race intersects with gender, class, and sexuality within typical PAR inquiries" (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 6). Fine and Torre et al (2004) credit South and Central American PAR theorists and practitioners such as Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals-Borda, for articulating how PAR is necessarily committed to "an explicit analysis of the relation of science to social inequality, community life, and radical social change" (p. 97). Herr and Anderson (2005) note that:

> In Freirean-inspired participatory research, the academic research model is challenged at almost every point. The dualisms of macro/micro, theory/practice, subject/object, and research/teaching are collapsed. This perspective also challenges many of the premises of more traditional models of action research…[which tend] to concentrate on an individual or group level analysis of problems, whereas participatory research, with its more emancipatory emphasis, tends to focus on a broader societal analysis. (p. 16)

This happens through the process of collective consciousness raising or "conscientization" (Freire, 1970; Freire, 1997), through which: "…people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and in which they find themselves; they come to see

the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 1997, p. 64). As Cahill, Rios-Moore and Threatts (2008) explain:

> Conscientization involves the critical reflection upon the contradictions in one's own everyday life and the transformation of oneself as part of this process…Key is the collective act of sharing and processing together our personal experiences, for example, the private pain and humiliation that comes with racism. In this way we became aware of how our personal experiences are connected to broader social problems and at the same time we felt a sense of solidarity. (p. 111-112)

*Ruth*

Our process of research was realizing our individual problems as greater social problems. There always seemed to be a "theme" like a string leading back to these greater issues. We're so used to being blamed for things we can't control we start blaming ourselves. Instead of looking out we internalize. A lot of the anger that many girls admitted to feeling, in the critical reflection stages of PAR, came from a feeling of powerlessness and social limitations. Once we started analyzing the "cause and effect" we came to the conclusions that the effects were not random and the causes were systemically rooted. The point in this is not to take the blame off ourselves and place it elsewhere; it is to come to a greater self and social awareness and to use this awareness, understanding and often pain as a motivation for social change.

*Elicia*

An important learning in our process is that having a grounding in critical theoretical frameworks, as an academic researcher and/or as a research team, does not guarantee ease in practicing critical PAR. It is difficult work precisely because the research and all of us as co-researchers were/are embedded in dominant, hegemonic discourses of white, capitalist, hetero-patriarchy, which are powerful forces that produce(d) multiple and ongoing contradictions in our

lives and in our critical research process. As such, it is important not to see PAR as a linear, purely counter hegemonic, transformative space/process; to do this would be to undermine the multiplicity of peoples' lives as they negotiate complex, unequal social structures (Guishard, 2009; Tuck, 2009b). Our collective writing about our study explores some of these tensions, contradictions, and anxieties that shaped our process. As well, the analysis I present in Chapters 4 through 6 provides a deep reading of the complexity and simultaneity of reproduction and resistance that emerged in our process and in our data.

Like Tuck et al (2008), we engaged our critical YPAR research approach to "demand access to the conversations, policies, theories, and spaces which we have been systematically denied, but better yet, demand that our research informs and inspires these efforts" (p. 50). This work is challenging as critical YPAR relies on extensive investment from co-researchers and a firm commitment to each other as a community (albeit a complex, constructed, and contestable one). As McClelland and Fine (2008b) articulate, "while the challenges of youth participatory action research (PAR) can be substantial, the contribution of critical research to social theory, social policy, and social movements can be exhilarating in terms of challenging dominant scripts and reimagining new conceptions for social justice" (p. 253). We agree that while our critical, girl-centred PAR project was constituted through the ongoing, multiple, shifting tensions and challenges we outline in this chapter, this type of research is absolutely necessary to address the gaps and erasures in research, policy, and practice affecting minoritized girls and youth.

*Overview of the Research Process*

Our research took place at Artemis Place during program hours over five months from February to June 2009. Recruitment sessions (described in the following section) were held the

two weeks preceding the start of the research project. For the first 12 weeks, we met for a two hour research session each week. We used arts- and discussion-based methods to cycle multiple times through the iterative phases of PAR: exploration/data collection, critical reflection/analysis, and action. We initially worked with photovoice and graffiti walls to explore research questions and begin to refine themes before deciding, five weeks into our process, to use video documentary as our primary arts-based research method and dissemination tool. After the first 12 weeks, we continued our weekly sessions, along with additional blocks of time throughout the week for film production, leading up to the premiere screening of our film. Importantly, each time our research team chose to pursue a method or action that strayed from the general research plan for which I initially received ethics approval, I had to submit modifications. This requirement was cumbersome in our process, and often felt constraining when I had to find the time to write a modification and wait up to a week for approval just so we could proceed. At times, I had to expend even more energy justifying certain modifications, such as the collective decision we made to use some of our limited funding for extra honoraria for two girls to take on roles as lead editors of our film.

*Recruitment*

Co-researchers were recruited from the cohort of girls enrolled as students at Artemis Place during the 2008/09 school year. There were 18 girls enrolled in the program during that time. The invitation was extended to all Artemis Place students with the intention of including all girls who expressed interest in and commitment to the project.

Recruitment of co-researchers took place at Artemis Place through two group information sessions held during program hours. I held two 2-hour sessions on different days in case there

were interested girls who were absent during one of the scheduled times. The second session was also offered as a refresher for any girls who attended the first session and had more questions. Staff informed girls of the days and times of the recruitment sessions during the regular announcements at check-out the previous Thursday and check-in the previous Monday so girls could plan to attend if they were interested. The sessions were also posted on the weekly schedule in the kitchen. Four girls attended the first recruitment session and five girls attended the second one. All nine girls joined the project as co-researchers, however one of the girls, Lizz, had a scheduling conflict with her work training program and so participated later in the process as an interviewee and during the dissemination phase of the research.

Later in the research process, girl co-researchers recruited and interviewed other girls in the program for the video documentary, offering the option for girls to be filmed or audio-recorded depending on their preferred level of anonymity. Girl co-researchers presented the opportunity to the other girls at Artemis Place during the program in each weekly check-out and check-in session over the three weeks of filming so that girls could choose at any point to participate.

*Informed consent*

Our process of informed consent was ongoing. During the recruitment session I went through the Consent Form (Appendix A) point by point, ensuring that the girls understood that their participation was entirely voluntary, they could withdraw at anytime, and that informed consent would be an ongoing process and they could decide at any time during the process if there was anything they said or created that they did not want used in the dissemination of the research. All of the girls signed the form. We checked in often throughout the process about how

we would be using girls' stories, photos, footage, journals, artwork, group projects, etc., both from the perspective of individual informed consent and from the perspective of how we wanted to present counter-narratives to our intended audience.

*Ruth*

I use the words researcher/participant almost interchangeably because we were doing the research about ourselves, we were researchers and participants. It was hard to play these two roles sometimes because we would say something brilliant on film and as researchers go "that's great, it totally speaks to what we're trying to show" and as a participant say "well I don't know if I'm comfortable sharing that now that I think about it." As researchers we had to push ourselves as participants which required reassurance from other group members. A lot of girls had trouble seeing themselves on camera and even though they were saying something important all they would notice is how bad their hair was that day and they would need someone to remind them of the value of their voice. When being interviewed many of the girls would ask "did that sound stupid?", "is that relevant?" or "did it make sense?" Because we're used to having our voices silenced we don't know how valuable, relevant and intelligent they are. That is something we had to work on collectively by reassuring and encouraging each other. We also revisited conversations often to re-check with girls if they were comfortable sharing what they had said in the last weeks' discussions or if they would prefer using an alias or "code name." You need that safe environment where people feel free to share but also to look out for people and leave it open for them to decide what is shared and what isn't so you're not exploiting their experiences.

*Elicia*

As Ruth explains above, because the team chose to produce a film that would be widely

available for public consumption, we were very careful throughout the process of filming to consider the implications of what would be included in the video and to repeatedly check in with girls about whether they were comfortable with every/any part of their filmed interviews/footage being used. A few times girl co-researchers shared quite personal stories on film and then decide that they did not want them made public in the final product, especially in instances when their families were implicated in the stories.

Girls' real names are used in this thesis when crediting the research team and when citing the words and images that have already been publicly attributed to them in our documentary film or in publications, for which they gave specific approval for their real names to be used. However, in my analysis of data that has not previously been made public, I use pseudonyms to protect the girls' anonymity. In addition to ongoing informed consent, in the next section I outline the other key tenets that shaped our collective research process.

*PAR tenets that shaped our process*

*Elicia, Ruth and Lizz*

Our research process was shaped by PAR tenets similar to those articulated by Tuck et al. (2008):

- There is transparency on all matters of the research;
- The research questions are co-constructed;
- The project design and design of research methods are collaboratively negotiated and constructed;
- Analysis is co-constructed; and
- The products of the research are dynamic, interactive, and are prepared and disseminated in collaboration

In some ways we can say we achieved all of these tenets. In other ways we can also say these are tenets toward which we aspired, but in different moments felt ourselves coming up short. For

instance, we placed a strong emphasis on co-construction as an ethical grounding for our work. However, we were always negotiating the challenges of accessible participation. As we discuss later, not all co-researchers could be equally involved throughout the process, so our co-construction relied on creative ways to bring girls' perspectives forward from previous sessions to account for the multiplicity in our group when not everyone was present.

*Becoming researchers together*

Each session started with a check-in so that girls could share how they were doing, what was going on for them that week, and/or any reflections or concerns about the research they wanted to discuss up front. This was a key informal opportunity to continually connect day to day experiences to our research focus and process. Zeller-Berkman (2007) has also noted the value of regular check-ins in the PAR process, through which the informal sharing of co-researchers' good and bad experiences over the week can inform and/or shift the research in important ways.

*Elicia*

After the check-in, each session began with a recap of what we had accomplished and where we were at in our process. This was important both to fill girls in who had not attended previous sessions and to reflect on the cyclical, systematic process of our research. I would bring the week's "unagenda" to each session. It was a piece of flip chart paper on which I broadly outlined activities/purposes for each session based on collective decisions from previous sessions. It was called the "unagenda" to remind us that it was open to revision at any moment by any of us. I appreciated the term because I was the one charged with bringing the "unagenda" to the sessions and did not want to be (seen as) responsible for dictating what we were doing.

I felt it was important that we created a research space in which we could understand ourselves as *already* knowledgeable, *already* exploring and theorizing our own realities, *already* becoming critical, and by extension, as *already* researchers. At the same time, the framing of our work as "research" and the structuring of our process as a participatory evaluation (which necessitated our becoming "researchers"), were heavily influenced and facilitated by me, Artemis Place, the evaluation grant, and my academic requirements and timelines. Additionally my hope that we would all see ourselves as researchers did not mitigate the dominant discourses that position research as the territory of "objective experts" in academic institutions.

*Elicia, Ruth, and Lizz*

The dominant image of the researcher that girls articulated in our research session was one of a highly educated, old, white-haired, White man in a lab coat. We framed our research to contest this limited understanding of who can be a researcher. Still, given these dominant ideas and the ways in which girls had been alienated from mainstream educational institutions where their knowledge and experiences were ignored and/or devalued, not all of the girls would have readily identified with the label "researcher." It was not necessary for everyone on the team to self identify this way. However, we always called our work together "research", emphasizing the importance of each of our particular contributions in the process, and creating space to reflect upon how our multiple cycles of data collection, critical analysis and action were moving us forward and deepening our understandings. This is a key PAR practice (Zeller-Berkman, 2007) that allowed co-researchers time to reflect on and share their own understanding of our process and our findings.

*Research Questions*

When we first came together as a group, the process of generating research questions helped us put many of the critical issues at stake on the table. Because the Artemis Place program is designed to "successfully support the most at-risk girls in our community as they transform their lives" (Artemis Place), our inquiry into how we got or ended up there opened a space to critically explore the systemic/systematic processes through which we have been marked "at-risk" or "high risk" and the structural inequities/barriers that are rendered invisible by these individualized "risk" labels. This allowed us to look at how we are positioned as "in need of help", and how our own understandings of our experiences contest this positioning. As Lizz writes, "I knew that myself and other girls were being judged just by saying we go to an alternative school and I wanted to help change that."

In our first research sessions, Elicia introduced the broad questions: How have things changed for us since coming to Artemis Place? How and why did we come to Artemis Place (or "end up" there)? From these initial questions, further questions were developed collaboratively as a research team.

The development of research questions throughout our process was ongoing and often it was only through our exploration and analysis that the questions we were asking came into focus and could be articulated. In exploring the initial broad question, "What has changed in our lives (good or bad or whatever) since coming to Artemis Place?", each co-researcher articulated that in her own experience Artemis Place has been important and contributed to positive change in her life. So we asked: Why is Artemis Place important for girls? Why is the program necessary? We asked these questions not just to explore what happened at Artemis Place that

made a positive difference in the lives of co-researchers and other girls in the program, but also to ask: What in society makes an "alternative" program like this necessary? Why do girls have to be categorized/assessed/labelled as "at-risk" or "high risk" to gain access to a supportive education program like Artemis Place?

Much of our inquiry focused on the stereotypes and structural barriers girls experience and how these are experienced differently or similarly inside and outside of Artemis Place. We explored questions like: How are we labeled and stereotyped as girls who go to an alternative school? Why are we labeled and excluded in these ways? What do these stereotypes do? What purpose do they serve? How do they impact/shape our experiences? What do they leave out/misrepresent about our complex experiences? What knowledges, skills, and strengths do we possess? How are these (not/under) valued in society? Why is this?

We also looked at the complexity of what happens at Artemis Place – that it could be a transformative space for girls, girls could have disempowering experiences there, and everything in between all at the same time. We asked about this complexity: How does Artemis Place challenge and/or reinforce the labels and/or exclusions we experience? When/why/how do we feel belonging and success at Artemis Place? What are the characteristics of the Artemis "community"? When/why/how do we experience labels and/or exclusions or other things that don't work for us at Artemis Place? How do the kinds of assessments required through funding structures impact this?

The (complex/non-linear) process and methods through which these questions were constructed, explored and analyzed is summarized in the following section.

## *Iterative Cycles of Data Collection, Collective Analysis, and Action*

### *Choosing and using arts-based methods*

#### *Elicia*

To engage in critical, girl-centred YPAR it is necessary to choose and use methods in ways that align with/enable critical frameworks and the commitment to a co-constructed research process. We used a combination of arts-based methods and focused discussion to undertake our exploration and analysis. In this section I briefly explore the use and limitations of arts-based methods in research more broadly and then provide a brief review of the arts-based methods we employed in our process: photovoice and participatory video. I also briefly describe our use of graffiti walls and mapping.

The arts have long been employed in community-based and participatory research processes. As a research approach, arts-based social exploration acknowledges alternative ways of knowing and views the assertion of their legitimacy as a means of shifting power into the hands of marginalized groups and away from the positivist articulations of the human condition given by traditional research (Clover, 2007). As such, arts-, aesthetic-, visual- and performance-based methods in participatory research are often situated as holding transformative potential to undermine hegemonic power structures, and are also frequently cited as "youth friendly", allowing for creativity and diversity of expression. However, both of these claims are highly contextual and contestable. Critiques of dominant developmental paradigms in research with children and youth reframe such assertions of "youth friendliness", arguing instead that research techniques are "not 'friendly' because they are relevant to a developmental stage but because they have been negotiated between researcher and researched" (Fraser, 2004 in Raby, 2007, p.

42). That is, it is the emphasis on the co-construction of and shared decision-making about methods, and the concomitant negotiation of power relations between and among co-researchers (for instance, youth and adults), that makes the means of research accessible to and "friendly" for (youth) co-researchers.

Khanna's (2011) analysis of decolonizing PAR practices with Indigenous and racialized girls explicates how the use of arts-based methods in critical PAR involves a deliberate praxis of unpacking and decentring white, capitalist, hetero-patriarchal, colonizing modes of knowledge production through the creation and interpretation of art. This critical process must be ongoing precisely because these dominant structural forces inevitably/continually leak back into PAR practices, as our research and our lives are inextricably bound up with and shaped by them.

Arts-based and creative methods can also provide important opportunities to think creatively about and implement collective action early and often throughout the critical YPAR process, rather than only at the "end" as the culmination of the research project (Tuck, 2009a). Tuck (2009a) and the youth team she researched with found forum theatre to be a powerful, embodied method that could be used by the youth research team to engage with youth participants in their study. She notes that this is "vital to [co-researchers'] learning and satisfaction in a PAR project" (Tuck, 2009a, p. 52). She articulates that in the educational justice YPAR projects she has worked on in New York City, this has meant "designing methods that blurred the lines between method and action, that were pedagogical or provocative, and that served in our projects as dynamic interventions to unfair practices" (p. 52-53). We found that using participatory video out in the community – for instance doing street interviews with random people to ask about stereotypes of girls who go to alternative schools – allowed us to

engage in public dialogues about our research long before the community screening and dialogue at the end of our process. It allowed us to start articulating our perspectives in informal conversations and to engage with the views of others, all while becoming increasingly confident in various skills required to produce our film: filming, sound recording, lighting, and interviewing. Throughout our process we also used photovoice, graffiti walls, and mapping as methods of data collection, all of which we explored and analyzed through focused discussion. These methods are outlined in more detail in the following sections. Using these various arts-based methods provided opportunities for multiple ways of engaging through bodies, voice, and images and enabled multiple forms of learning, knowing, and coming together that worked to sustain our creative energies throughout our process.

### *Photovoice*

Photovoice was originally developed by Wang and Burris (1997) as a method that:

> entrusts cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders, and potential catalysts for change, in their own communities. It uses the immediacy of the visual image to furnish evidence and to promote an effective, participatory means of sharing expertise and knowledge. (p. 369)

Wang and Burris developed this method using theoretical frameworks from critical consciousness pedagogy, feminist theory, and documentary photography, and drawing on work by grassroots groups "challeng[ing] assumptions about representation and documentary authorship" (p. 370).

After our first discussion session in week one (during which we explored the questions "What has changed for you, good or bad or whatever, since you came to Artemis?") I introduced photovoice to the team as a creative method for us to use in the initial investigation of girl co-

researchers' experiences to get a sense of the most salient issues and explore options for our focusing our research through collective, emergent analysis of the photos.

Importantly, photovoice provided opportunities for co-researchers to "become the producers, rather than the consumers" (Larkin et. al., 2008, pg.7) of messages about "at-risk" teen girls and to "capture, reflect and re-create images that bring to life the particulars of their lived experiences," (Hurlock & Barlow, 2008, p. 117) within the larger context of the community. Vaughn, Rojas-Guyler, and Howell (2008) emphasize how the method of photovoice enables collective co-construction and a depth of analysis in knowledge production that may not emerge through more traditional methods, stating that, in their research, "at times the girls would say something extremely insightful that we believe was unlikely to occur without the photograph" (p. 315). They attribute this to photovoice because:

> Such an approach allows for … a deeper understanding of how people make meaning in their lives rather than imposing a research objective upon a community, often with predetermined assumptions and outcomes. The photographs provide a creative and effective way to discuss often difficult and deeply felt issues and mobilize a group to affect change. (p. 308)

In analyzing arts-based data (e.g. photography) through a PAR framework, Wang (1999) recommends a series of critical, action- and social justice-oriented questions represented by the acronym SHOWED:

- What so we **S**ee or how do we name this problem?
- What is really **H**appening?
- How does this story relate to **O**ur lives?
- **W**hy does this problem exist and what are the root causes?
- How might we become **E**mpowered now that we understand better?
- What can we **D**o about it?

While I presented these guiding questions to the group on flip chart paper in our two photovoice discussion sessions, the girls preferred a more open format of exploring the images whereby the photographer took time to share what her photo(s) meant to her and from there group discussion emerged organically about how other girls related to the photos through their own life experiences. Importantly, only two of the six girls who attended our first photovoice discussion session in week two remembered/chose to take photos. We checked in about the challenges some girls experienced with photovoice. The first challenge that arose was that the photovoice handout[10] I provided the girls outlined photo-taking as an "assignment" – a term that frequently appears in other photovoice studies (Strack, Magill & McDonagh, 2004; Vaughn, Rojas-Guyler & Howell, 2008). When I introduced photovoice at the end of our first week, this immediately produced anxiety for one of the girls: "It's an assignment? Are we getting graded?" Later, in the following week's discussion session, another girl shared that she did not take pictures because she did not want to do it wrong. Given the content of our first week's discussion that included some girls sharing experiences of being made to feel stupid in school, the framing of the photo-taking as an "assignment" was not only unfortunate, but also seemed to undermine the experimental, to-be-collectively-negotiated spirit in which I introduced the method.

One photo in particular (because it was not taken with a particular intention in relation to the research) incited me to think differently about photovoice and representation in participatory research. The girl who brought the photo explained that it was her favourite even though it was not necessarily taken or chosen with our research question in mind. She was out with a friend

[10] Adapted from: Lee, Jo-Anne. (2007). Identity, Belonging and Solidarity – Photovoice Project. Department of Women's Studies, University of Victoria, Victoria BC

who used her disposable camera to take a photo of the sunset (pictured below).

Figure 1: Sunset

The photo elicited some unexpected insights:

Bailey: I was bored and I didn't know what to take a picture of so we took a picture of the whole sun set thing.

Elicia: Does anyone have anything special that a sunset might mean for them?

Amy: Sunsets calm me down if I'm having a stressed out day and I go and sit by the water and watch the sunset or the sunrise, it's so beautiful and I can just sit there and think

Laura: Every time I see a sun set or a sun rise or the sky has some crazy colours in it that look really pretty I always think like all those colours are from pollution (…) Because if you think about it, I bet you can remember we're having a lot prettier sunsets and sun rises and that's because we're polluting our world more.

Elicia: How did you come to think about things in that way?

> Laura: Like I said before, when I was younger, things that would normally make me upset or make me feel wrong or made me feel like something wasn't right, I wouldn't really think about it. I'd be like whatever everybody feels like that. You know, with everything like with the way that women are objects and the way we kill animals and like make other peoples' lives shitty for our own pleasure, sort of thing. I never really understood why that made me upset until I came here [to Artemis] and then people told me that it's okay to feel whatever you feel and you don't have to be shy or embarrassed that you want to actually stand up for something that you believe in, rather than just following the crowd and being like "fuck it."

This conversation demonstrated to me that it is far too limiting to frame photo-taking as a representational exercise. Bailey and her friend took the picture of the sunset because they were bored and they produced an image that in turn produced multiple meanings as we connected with the photo in/through our discussion. However, in some photovoice studies much emphasis is placed on the photographer's intended representation when attributing value to the photo in relation to the research. For instance, Strack et al. (2004) state that "group discussions are a critical aspect of the photovoice process because they create opportunities in which participants can inspire each other to take better, more informative pictures…" (p. 52); our process showed us that group discussion provided us an opportunity to make multiple, complex meanings of girls' photos, rather than assessing the intended informative/representational quality of the images. I further analyze how our process complicated ideas of representation and art in Chapter 6.

Strack et al. (2004) also take up dominant developmental discourses in categorizing young people and their photo-taking/ analytical abilities, framing this as a challenge in their research:

> Early in the project, many of the youth were more interested in taking pictures of friends and families than of community assets and deficits. Photographs were viewed as a way to tell the world about themselves. This coincides with the appropriate developmental stages of youth, with youth at earlier developmental stages focusing on personal identification and more developmentally advanced youth moving beyond self to a social identification perspective. In recognition of this, the project staff members decided to encourage all youth to take pictures describing their lives and identifying who they are while challenging more developmentally advanced youth to expand their subject matter to include social context. In keeping with this, the exhibits were divided into the following two sections: personal photographs and community photographs. (p. 52)

Working from a framework that is intentionally critical of these kinds of binary categorizations (personal vs. social identification; more vs. less developmentally "advanced"; personal vs. community), I endeavoured to facilitate an open process of co-constructing knowledge and meaning from/ through/with the photos.

Girls became more comfortable with photovoice as a method during our week two discussion, strategizing ways to make it a "friendlier" method, such as teaming up to take photos together. However, it was not the method the girls ultimately wanted to pursue, because they were strongly drawn to using video and producing a film. So after two photovoice discussion sessions with different configurations of girls in attendance, we used our analyses of discussion and photovoice data to identify themes to pursue in greater depth through participatory video.

*Participatory video*

At the beginning of the school year at Artemis Place, all of the girls and staff watched a short film made by Artemis girls four years earlier in the inaugural year of the program. There was a lot of buzz in the program about how cool it would be to make a new video. So at the outset of our research process the video idea resurfaced and girl co-researchers became excited at the possibility of making the video through our research process. The original film was not made

in the context of a research project, so we discussed how a new film could offer girls' critical analysis of their experiences and processes of transformation through their participation in the Artemis Place program. It would inevitably be a different kind of film and would be useful in different ways for the girls, the agency, and the film's audience (which we determined through our process to be those who work with girls and/or influence the kinds of interventions experienced by girls who are labelled "at-risk.") Importantly, in order to take on this project, we partnered with local filmmaker Monique Cartesan who mentored us throughout the production of our film. We also partnered with local non-profit film organization MediaNet, which provided low-cost equipment rental, editing suites, and technical training and support.

In order to produce a film as a research method we drew on Participatory Video (PV). PV has been described by Shaw and Robertson (1997) as "a process of media production to empower people with the confidence, skills and information they need to tackle their own issues" (p. 26). Chowdhury and Hauser (2010) note that co-researchers using PV are "implicitly using their own voices that may feature on film, but perhaps more so, in all of the recording and editing stages. The process ultimately develops their self-consciousness and empowers them through skill and knowledge acquisition and group development" (p. 356). One of the first documented uses of PV with/by a community to influence policy was a National Film Board project in a small fishing community on Fogo Island, Newfoundland, in1967. The community, in partnership with NFB filmmakers, produced a film about the unequal social conditions shaping their lives in order to intervene in the government's plan to resettle the community without public consultation (Harris, 2009). As a research method, participatory video is typically:

> … directed by a group of grassroots people, moving forward in iterative cycles of shooting-reviewing. This process aims at creating video narratives that communicate what those who participate in the process really want to communicate, in a way they think is appropriate. (Johansson et al. 1999 in Kindon, 2003, p. 143)

Taken up through a critical, feminist PAR framework, using video in this way is intended as a politicized disruption of the hegemonic, colonial origins of knowledge production and film, particularly in research. Gallagher and Kim (2008) discuss how photography, film, and video have been "instrumental to the colonial project of surveying the 'exotic'", which is also linked to how the camera has become ubiquitously implicated in multiple forms of social control in Western contexts, such as surveillance cameras in schools (p. 104). They go on to state that:

> A cursory look at the lexicon common to photography, film, and video also suggests its colonial roots: 'white balance', a 'take', 'shooting', 'capturing', 'subjects'. There are positions of power related to being 'in front of' or 'behind' the camera; of being 'photogenic' or not; of the tone of one's skin. For instance, camera technology favours the appearance of white skin. 'White balance', in technical terms, remains the default mode to which cameras are set and, in theoretical terms, the default mode to which the researcher's eye has become adjusted…with respect to visual media and research, it is not a question of simply replacing the 'White gaze' with that of the 'Other' but of challenging the very naturalized modes of film/video and research production. (p. 104-105)

Kindon (2003) notes that PV intends toward a disruption of colonial, hegemonic uses of visual recordings in research, with an explicit "interest in, and commitment to, the destabilization of power relations between researcher/research subjects or observer/observed, as well as to the exploration of transformation and research that makes a difference" (p. 144). Our video process involved girls constructing and critically analyzing their own counter-gaze as the creative producers of the film, as well as unpacking the complexities of the dominant gaze of the

audience – producing counter-narratives that were mediated and strategized. I discuss this in more depth in the Collective Analysis section of this chapter. Analyses of the simultaneity of reproduction and resistance in our film are also further explored in chapters 5 and 6.

In our experience, shifting the production of knowledge about/representations of "at-risk" girls from academics to the girls themselves enabled girls to push back against and beyond reductive narratives of their experiences and lives. Similarly, based on her research on sexualities with queer youth using digital video, Driver (2007) discusses how (queer) young people's sexualities are often constructed through research in order to render them intelligible within dominant, adult-centric paradigms – categorized as "copies" of what are already discrete, knowable identities. She (2007) states:

> Paying attention to creative initiatives of youth as a starting point for qualitative research is a useful way to decenter adult authoritative knowledges away from institutionally bound methods, following the lead of youth to affirm mediums, communicative styles, and social arenas connected to their everyday worlds of experience. (p. 317)

Driver explains that using digital video enabled queer youth to take creative control over arts-based media to explore the complexities of their sexualities that are placed under erasure via dominant scripts, which enabled their art to "talk back to dominant heterogendered discourses" (315). It is important to again reaffirm the complexity of producing alternative narratives. For instance, part of girls negotiating self-representations that contested "risk" discourses meant making themselves intelligible to audiences – and to themselves – through dominant, neoliberal discourses of transformation and success.

*Graffiti walls and mapping*

I introduced graffiti walls as an activity that would provide a useful entry point to further explore the theme of labels/stereotypes that had emerged in our process, and also to further explore girls' skills and strengths. We used two wall-sized pieces of paper where girls' ideas could be captured quickly and graphically while their bodies were free to move around, chat, laugh, and dance and sing to the music in the background. One of our graffiti walls was labelled "Stereotypes" and the other was labelled "Strengths". The juxtaposition of the levity of the atmosphere with the difficult labels girls were writing on the "Stereotypes" wall demonstrates the value of using this method to name and discuss painful experiences and inequities while still breathing fun and humour into the research space. I discuss the complexities and contradictions of the pain and the humour in Chapter 4.

On similarly large sheets of newsprint we mapped out broad ideas for our video (from content ideas, to action items such as interviewing, to audience). This served as a method of refining our analysis to make decisions about the scope of our video.

*Collective analysis*

All research sessions at Artemis Place were audio recorded. However, due to limited resources we were not able to have the sessions transcribed during the process. Instead, to document our focused discussions, we relied on thorough flip chart notes. In the time between sessions, I would review the recordings to check the flip chart notes for accuracy and add notes and quotes where any points were unclear. Our data sources also included: photos; graffiti walls; idea maps; story boards; and, video footage of interviews, program activities, staged scenes, the space inside Artemis Place, and other images. While girls were provided with journals to

document their reflections, none of the girls provided written reflections to be used as data. While I engaged in written reflection via field notes throughout the process, I did not provide my journal to the group either, rather I used my writings to inform the verbal reflections I brought to the team.

*Elicia, Ruth, and Lizz*

Our critical analytical framework was collectively developed over the months we researched together through the way we teased out and named the structural inequalities shaping girls' experiences. While Elicia asked many of the critical probing questions in our first couple of discussions, a few of the girls also came into the project with a critical lens on social justice issues and provoked other co-researchers to notice and ask questions about why things seemed unfair and why girls (who are poor, in care, alienated from mainstream schools, etc.) were positioned in certain ways. Our process of analysis involved engaging with photos, graffiti walls, and video footage to critically reflect on what we saw and felt and what we wanted to show people about ourselves. We discussed what were emerging as important similarities and differences in our experiences. We reviewed all of the flip chart notes and photos to do a first level analysis of emerging themes. We coded themes and decided to narrow our research focus to explore three main areas of inquiry: stereotypes/constructions of girls who go to alternative schools; girls' strengths, knowledge and skills; and, community, belonging and sisterhood at Artemis Place. We further explored these themes by developing interview questions and interviewing other girls in the program, interviewing random people on the street to talk about stereotypes, and discussing and storyboarding what we wanted to tell people about ourselves and our lives through film. During the production of the film we would review footage in research

sessions and in the editing suite to do deeper level analysis of our themes and choose what we wanted to show in the public documentary film.

The title of our video documentary, The Artemis Effect: When girls talk back, reflects our desire to re-appropriate "back talk" the way we re-appropriate anger – as a politicized tool for mobilizing resistance. As such, talking back requires strategic deliberation about which stories to tell and how. It requires

> thinking through the entanglements of representation, audience, and the presentation of research especially as we hoped to speak to a broad audience with diverse political commitments. What is safe to share and what isn't? Who is made vulnerable by the research?... These decisions are at the heart of the ethical commitment of PAR and point to our responsibility, and a process, to consider the political ramifications of making the invisible visible. (Cahill, 2007, p. 367)

For instance, during our process we explored and analyzed some girls' experiences related to drug and alcohol use. However, we deliberately chose to leave out references to substance use that came up in some of the girls' interviews when editing our film. We had spent five months exploring and analyzing the complexity of our experiences, while also deconstructing the reductive and inaccurate depictions and understandings of our realities that proliferate across the multiple contexts of our lives. We were sceptical as to whether substance use would be understood (properly interpreted) contextually, as interlocking with the complex, systemic inequalities girls negotiate and their strategies for responding to unjust social conditions. We were deeply concerned that the substance use of "at-risk" girls would only be taken up via the "girl-in-crisis scripts" (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011) already permeating dominant representations and perceptions of us. So, we strategically presented our analysis for

public consumption, understanding the function of silence in de-centring powerful, dominant discourses. What we do not say/show cannot be misinterpreted and used against us.

Fine et al. (2000) discuss the tensions inherent in reporting "bad stories" in social justice research, where on the one hand, silencing of these stories (such as those of drug use) can serve to "deny the effects of poverty, racism, and abuse," while on the other hand, "to report these stories is to risk their more than likely misuse... [and may do] more damage than good, depending on who consumes/exploits them" (p. 116). We see these tensions as deeply intertwined with Tuck's (2009b) analysis of damage-centred research frameworks, and how research can be used to undermine the very communities for which it seeks justice. Instead, using the complex analyses we generated collectively throughout our research process, we strategically used our film to speak our critical knowledge, advocate for ourselves and girls like us, and articulate our strengths, skills, and hopes.

*Action*

Our project involved multiple actions that happened throughout the process and continue (to a lesser extent) today. The various forms of action we undertook included: interviewing other girls in the program and members of the public; presenting recommendations for future directions for the Artemis Place program to the Executive Director based on our findings; engaging in a community dialogue at the premiere screening of our film; planning and presenting/facilitating multiple workshops and presentations; widespread dissemination of our film online; and, our collectively authored book chapter (Loiselle, Taylor & Donald, forthcoming).

*Lizz*

We stopped letting society define us and started to define and create ourselves. I think we really surprised a lot of people in that process because “problematic” girls like us are/were considered lazy/crazy/stupid. I believe we changed that by telling our stories and sharing how we feel about how we're being treated and looked at, and doing so in a responsible and respectful manner. I think that people were surprised at how capable we proved to be.

## *Strengths and Limitations of Our PAR Project*

### *Constructing a girl-led process*

*Ruth*

The process was girl-led in that our motivation and ideas were never forced, there was always open dialogue, and it was never one person deciding on behalf of the group what was important or what we would do next. And even though Elicia was the facilitator she did a very good job of always making sure the researchers’ voices were the main focus of the project. She let the girls lead the discussions and decide on the topics we would focus on. She never assumed that her views, opinions or education were more important than ours. I think she truly was learning from us and not just using our experiences for her work. She understood her role was to facilitate us in our own process and not to guide the project away from that.

*Elicia*

It’s cool for me to read Ruth’s perspective of our girl-led process, and it reminds me how difficult it was for me to attend to power and “equality” in our process. We talked a lot about power as a research team. How power functioned at Artemis Place between and among staff and girls, how power operates at broader systemic levels to privilege some people/ experiences/

knowledge and marginalize others, as well as how we understood power in our process. For instance, I acknowledged from the beginning that I had more power coming into the room as an adult, youth worker, and academic researcher and we discussed what that would mean for us – how, as a co-researcher with different and particular accountability to the rest of the research team, I would position myself as an ally and advocate in our research and activism, how I would access resources at the university and in the community to support our research and make sure that we would have venues to reach our intended audiences in the dissemination phase. Within the trusting relationships we built, we relied on each other to identify if any of us perceived our process to be straying away from our commitment to our collective ethic of PAR as co-constructed. At the same time, I was aware that our relationships with each other were all different, with power operating and shifting differently between and across our experiences with and positions in relation to each other, and it could not be taken for granted that trust would level power.

Even when Ruth says that I "let the girls lead the discussions", which could be taken (and was in many ways intended) as a power mediating practice, I am brought to the heightened awareness that dominant social structures position me as the one with the power to "let" the girls lead the process. I felt a steady discomfort about that, echoing Eve Tuck's (2009a) similar experience that "it was difficult at first...not to become preoccupied with equal distributions of knowledge, power, responsibility, and vision" (p. 60). At the same time, my co-researchers were clear that it was important for them that I provided consistency and structure that would allow them to deeply engage in the research without having responsibilities downloaded onto them that

were unrealistic and inappropriate given the kinds of responsibilities they were already shouldering in their daily lives.

Some of the most difficult work of critical PAR is getting comfortable with discomfort – the uncertainty of and tensions within the process – in order to really engage with what is emerging. I found that after awhile I began to count on the messiness as an indication that we were digging into the complexity of deep, collective work, and/or as a reminder that we were doing research within complex and often unpredictable lives and within powerful structural forces. These things needed to be honoured for their importance, even if they did produce a perpetual knot in my belly.

*Mediating structural barriers through the structure of PAR*

*Elicia, Ruth and Lizz*

The social conditions the girls were negotiating during our research were both the content of our investigation and the material conditions that structured our research and our efforts to make participation accessible to all of the co-researchers. For instance, one of our co-researchers had taken a photo early on in the process (see Chapter 5) that depicted her struggle between staying in school with the hope of moving toward a successful career and leaving school to work so she could earn money because she was broke. She left school at Artemis Place half way through our research project to work full time. As a team, we had undergone analyses of and were subsequently faced with responding to this reality in figuring out how to keep our research process accessible to a co-researcher for whom our regular research session times no longer worked. We kept in touch with her by phone with updates and she came back to do interviews

for the film and be part of the dialogue at the premiere screening. She also rejoined us to do research presentations at UVic months after the initial project concluded.

Similarly, other girls had to miss research sessions to work, to babysit younger family members, because they were dealing with unstable housing situations, and for multiple other reasons. We were continually adapting our process to ensure that all of the co-researchers' contributions to analyses were brought forward into subsequent PAR cycles and that our research space remained open to co-researchers as they were able to rejoin us.

*Reproducing whiteness through the PAR process*

*Elicia*

Even as we were committed to exploring girls' intersectional, complex realities to deepen our analyses, our process in Project Artemis cannot be romanticized and was not innocent of reproducing problematic erasures. One of the most difficult admissions for me as a social justice researcher and activist is our inadequate exploration and analysis of racism and whiteness/neo-colonialism across girls' experiences and within our research process. As discussed earlier, critical YPAR is designed to make visible the marginalizing erasures within dominant, traditional forms of academic research. It is designed to deliberately investigate and theorize race and racism in intersection with the multiple, mutually constituting processes of subject formation within and across marginalized communities of youth. Fine et al. (2000) write that,

> "Race" is a place in which poststructuralism and lived realities need to talk. "Race" is a social construction, indeed. But "race" in a racist society bears profound consequences for daily life, identity and social movements and for the ways in which most groups "other". (p. 112)

As a research facilitator equipped with a critical framework from which to interrogate whiteness in our process, I must take responsibility for what I withheld and ask myself why. My own

preoccupation with creating space for the girls to make decisions about what we inquired about, and not to impose my own agenda, allowed us to remain easily embedded in whiteness. In an attempt to disrupt hegemonic power relations within our research team I focused on a girl-led PAR praxis, neglecting my responsibility to share a particular and necessary critical lens with our team. In so doing I neglected to attend to the macro forces of power constituting and constituted by our practices. I see this as a leakage of dominant (white) research discourses, in that I slipped into seeing myself as an outsider who should be objective and not taint the girls' voices and experience. This is highly problematic because, contrary to our commitment to critical consciousness, it assumes girls' have a pure, unmediated voice or perspective that is outside of complex power structures. That I thought of exploring and analysing whiteness as my own agenda is a force and function of whiteness that reduces analyses of race to a special interest, allowing white power structures to remain hidden from view. As Frankenberg (1997) notes, whiteness works to "cover the tracks of its constructedness, specificity, and localness, even as they appear" (p. 16). I explore some of the ways whiteness functioned in our process in Chapter 5 when I explore the theme of community, belonging and sisterhood in our research. These tensions in our process cannot be resolved. Rather, I offer this critical lens now to hold myself and all critical PAR researchers accountable to the foundational ethics of this approach, even as I struggle with my lack of accountability in the moment(s) of our research.

Bringing this chapter to a conclusion seems as challenging as bringing our PAR process to an end, which has not really happened in the nearly two years since our initial project wrapped up. The learning goes on in iterative cycles and different combinations of our research team members have continued to present, workshop, and write about our process and findings. When

research is deeply entwined with and grounded in lived lives, it can become embodied and mobilized into indeterminable present and future possibilities, as each of us takes it with us and enacts it in different ways. In writing this chapter, the linearity of the written word has come into tension with the non-linearity of our learning, practice, and reflections. However, we hope we have succeeded in articulating some of the messy complexity and richness of what PAR is and has been for us as a collective of researchers. And we hope it will be taken up in the spirit in which it is offered – as enticement toward the challenging, unsettling, empowering, personal, political and ethical commitment to deeply participatory and collaborative research that is grounded in social justice and action for change.

# Chapter 3: Analytical Framework

While our documentary film and the community dialogues we engaged in served as the primary dissemination tools for our collective analysis, there is a significant amount of data that we did not further analyze and disseminate for strategic and logistical reasons (e.g. the collectively defined objectives of our film, the sheer volume of data we produced, and the constraints of our time together as a research team.) While I have struggled ethically with the prospect of undertaking my own analysis, as this seems to undermine the tenets of collective research, I have chosen to use my thesis as an opportunity to explore and disseminate more of the rich knowledge/data we generated that would otherwise go unshared.

## *My Process of Analysis*

My thesis analysis followed along the thematic paths generated through our collective analysis to further engage with and complicate our critical explorations of: stereotypes and constructions of "at-risk" girls; girls' strengths (knowledges, skills and strategies); and, community, belonging, and sisterhood at Artemis Place. We had explored these themes through our multiple methods and discussions described in the previous chapter. To undertake my individual analysis, I listened multiple times to our research session audio recordings, while reading back through my journal notes and reviewing the arts-based data generated through and discussed during our sessions (photos, graffiti walls, idea maps, storyboards, and our documentary film). After several cycles of reviewing these multiple data sources, I transcribed and thematically coded audio and video data into the broad level themes we had collectively

generated. I wanted to stay close to these themes to honour our collaborative process and attend to the nuances of our findings that could not be explored within our film.

In addition to expanding and complexifying the analysis we had generated through our collaborative process, I identified significant new threads that seemed to be woven across our findings, providing a conceptual frame from which to trace connections/disruptions among the themes generated by our team. For instance, I was drawn to how resistance resonated across these themes. Reading deeply for resistance then helped me to complexify analyses within each theme. Similarly, I also noticed the themes of feminism and sexuality emerging in significant ways across our data. In another listening I was intensely drawn to the humour – the affective energy – emerging in and shaping our process. I also wanted to attend to the gaps and erasures in our process that were not adequately interrogated during our work together. For instance, while we asked about community and belonging at Artemis Place, we did not attend to the systemic erasures produced by dominant whiteness and how they were functioning in our process. I wanted to use my thesis to be accountable to the difficult and necessarily unresolved work of naming these tensions. As I was engaging with our data in this way, I was working to extend my theoretical framework in a way that would make more room for all of the richness and complexity in which I was immersed.

Our methodological framework was explicitly invested in developing critical consciousness and mobilizing collective resistance to structural inequities. The process of naming and contesting constraining discourses of girlhood and risk was pivotal to our work, and at the same time there was so much happening in our conversations that was not accounted for through our deliberate and strategized acts of speaking back publicly. As I have already noted,

through my multiple readings of our data I have been repeatedly drawn to girls' shifting and multiple resistances that emerge in the complex interplay/ connection/ alignment/ contradiction of discursive and embodied knowledges.

In this chapter, I delineate the tensions and limitations of reading resistance in the narratives and actions of girls that led me to complicate my reading through a hybridized theoretical framework – one that works with feminist poststructural concepts of power, subjectivity, and resistance (Butler, 2004; Davies, 2000; Davies et al, 2006; McLaren, 2004) while also drawing on the Deleuzian concept of desire (Colebrook, 2002; Deleuze 1997; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Olkowski, 2000; Ringrose, 2011) and its reconfiguration by Tuck (2009b, 2010). I explicate how I work (with) these conceptual tools through the analyses I present in chapters 4 through 6 to read resistance alongside desire – resistance as both politically coded, organized desire and as unintended "lines of flight" – in order to understand the complexity of girls' experiences that emerge in our data.

*Analyzing for Resistance: Possibilities and Tensions*

My approach to our research and my analysis has been heavily informed by feminist poststructuralist conceptualizations of power, subjectivity, and their problematization of modernist notions of agency. Feminist poststructuralist ideas are useful in rendering visible the multiplicity and contradiction of complex subjectivities formed by/in/through diffuse networks of power (Davies, 2000). This is an important framework because it enables recognition and politicization of the girls' negotiations of uneven social structures. As I elaborated in my literature review earlier, and as Raby (2006) also notes in her work on girls and resistance, within the dominant Euro-Western developmental framework that functions through neoliberal

humanism, it is almost impossible for the resistant narratives and actions of youth, and particularly teenage girls, to be read as anything other than rebellion and/or deviance. Through neoliberal, humanist frameworks – which inform mainstream research, practice, and interventions with youth/girls – agency is conceptualized via the rational, coherent, humanist subject. That is, the subject is viewed as an essential, coherent self that precedes the social – is pre-discursive. The subject is thus decontextualized and depoliticized and agency reduced to individual capacity to make *the* right/appropriate choice and pursue *the* right/appropriate action. Raby (2006) notes that modernist frameworks tend to categorize resistance as either deviance or appropriation and assess it in terms of its effectiveness in challenging forces of domination. Resistant actions or narratives that reproduce rather than subvert the status quo – what Raby calls "reproductive resistance" – are thus often reduced to conformity within such frameworks. For instance, a girl who tells a teacher off and is sent to detention is read as merely reproducing the discourse of "teenage rebellion"; the "effectiveness" of or possibilities for her actions as resistance are thus dismissed. As colleagues and I have argued elsewhere, such readings of girls' actions and narratives within a modernist, neoliberal frame "do not account for the complex and uneven ways in which minoritized girls engage as knowledge producers and advocates in contexts that impede their politicization and social inclusion" (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011, p. 85).

In her work about girls' resistance through punk subculture, Leblanc (2002) posits that "girls' subjective accounts of resistance cast a new light on our knowledge of adolescent female development" (p. 18). In this vein, I found that doing a critical reading of resistance enabled me to acknowledge girls' negotiations of power structures, thus legitimizing girls' particular

knowledge of complex social conditions and undermining universalist (white, masculinist) developmental paradigms. Yet methodologically and conceptually there emerged constraining tensions for me in analyzing resistance.

Methodological questions have been raised by some researchers in girlhood studies about the validity of analyses of resistance – how to accurately determine what counts as resistance and what is being resisted (Leblanc, 2002; Raby, 2006). For instance, drawing on her review of cultural studies literature on resistance through subcultures, Leblanc (2002) argues that "[a]lthough [semiotic readings] are important and interesting, their failure to present accounts of intent in the construction of resistance seriously impugns their validity" (p. 16). She goes on to insist that:

> accounts of resistance must detail not only resistant acts, but the subjective intent motivating these as well. Drawing from subculture theory and feminist research, I add to this that such resistance includes not only behaviours, but discursive and symbolic acts as well...the person engaging in resistant acts *must do so consciously and be able to relate that consciousness and intent*... [my emphasis]. (p. 18)

Methodologically fixing the concept of resistance in the interest of validity (e.g. that it must be conscious/intended, relatable/languagable), limits its usefulness for our/my analysis of girls' complex lives. Such limitations only further obscure unintentional/ unanticipated/difficult-to-name/ embodied forces, acts, narratives, knowledges, events, affects in our research process that produce alternatives, enable survival, and/or push at/past the limits of available discourses of "at-risk" "girl" (however momentary or sustainable such ruptures/possibilities may be). The rigid qualifiers put forward by Leblanc would not attend to validity in our research precisely because they could not account for these kinds of complexities. As I explore in chapters 4 through 6, the experiences of girls that emerged through our research reveal the multiplicity and specificity of

their negotiations of power – the micro-level, complex interplay (and at times simultaneity) of resistance, reproduction and complicity. As such, our research process and the data and analysis it generated demand that my analysis in this thesis work to disrupt and reconfigure discrete or fixed notions of resistance. In the next section I explore feminist poststructuralism as both a site of possibilities and limitations for my analysis of resistance, before moving on to explicate my use of desire.

*Poststructural Resistance: Power, Subjectivity, and Agency*

As Raby (2006) notes, the theoretical framework through which we understand resistance "affects how, when and where spaces of girlhood resistance will be identified" (p. 139). She argues that readings of resistance are contingent on conceptualizations of power, subject formation, and agency. In feminist poststructuralist analyses informed by Foucault, power is conceptualized as relational and diffuse (Butler, 2004; Davies, 2000). It is everywhere, comes from everywhere: "It is the moving substrate of force relations...always local and unstable...[It] is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). Foucault's analytic of power serves to disrupt the overly simplistic dominant/subordinate dichotomy where power is understood to be held by one who wields it over the "other." While power becomes consolidated or crystallized in institutions, laws and various social hegemonies, Foucault's analysis argues that "power is nonsubjective in the sense that individuals do not *have* power; rather they participate in it." (McLaren, 2004, p. 219). While Foucault did not undertake feminist analyses in his own work, feminist poststructuralist scholars have found his analysis of power and resistance useful in theorizing the complexity of gendered and intersecting subject formations (Butler, 2004; Davies, 2000; McLaren, 2004).

For Foucault, power and resistance are mutually constituting forces: "in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all" (Foucault 1997 in McLaren, 2004, p. 218). Power and resistance, as mutually constituting forces, produce the subject in multiple, contradictory ways through negotiations of/interactions with cultural and social discourses (practices, language, ideologies, etc.) (Davies, 2000). As such, dominant concepts of agency grounded in humanist frameworks are necessarily reconfigured, so that girls' skills and advocacy strategies for negotiating complex and contradictory discourses can be understood through what Davies (2000) refers to as "poststructural agency", through which:

> ...the speaking/writing subject can move between and within discourses, can see precisely how they subject her, and can use the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse, or go beyond the other, in terms of both her own experienced subjectivity and how she speaks in relation to the subjectivities of others (p. 60).

Thus, through feminist poststructuralism, resistance is understood as discursively constructed through thoughts and actions mediated by relations of power. In this vein, Davies (2000) argues that those who are conscious of the processes through which their subjectivities are formed are "better positioned to resist particular forms of subjectivity rather than cling to them through a mistaken belief that they are their own – that they signal who they are" (Davies, 2000, p. 161).

This framework, in its focus on the "speaking/writing subject" coming to consciousness/ language to name and resist structural inequities and dominant ideologies/discourses, was politically significant in our research for naming and unpacking gendered and intersecting inequities. However, it also leaves something(s) unaccounted for in our research – things that emerged as ruptures/resistances that were not necessarily conscious or intentional or grounded in

intelligible ways in subjective experiences: embodied knowledge of and resistance to injustice that preceded any particular theorizing of processes of subject formation; points of resistance and reproduction in constant flux; energies and forces that surged and expanded through/between our bodies, ideas, words, laughter, producing a sort of affective resistance (the focus of Chapter 6). As such, there are limitations in poststructural "discursive determinism" that works at a linguistic/cognitive level, to the exclusion of complex understandings of embodied and affective resistances and what McNay (2000) describes as generative and creative forms of agency.

Resistance is both important as a politicized act (particularly for the discursively depoliticized bodies and knowledges of girls labelled "at-risk"), and *also* limited when read *only* as deliberate, conscious/politicized (re)action against intelligible forces of domination. To this end, in the next section I explore how the concept of desire as articulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) offers a theoretical tool that pushes at/beyond the limits of subjectivity in ways that work alongside my feminist poststructuralist orientation to better account for these complexities that emerge in our data as (simultaneously) discursive, generative, creative, affective and embodied.

*As a Means of Complicating Resistance: Desire...*

To expand my analysis of resistance in our data, I have turned to girlhood and critical youth studies scholars using (Renold & Ringrose, 2008; Ringrose, 2011; Skott-Myhre, 2008) and re-working (Tuck 2009b, Tuck 2010) the Deleuzian concept of desire, because it has enabled me to better understand the complexity of girls' negotiations and resistances as they emerge through and beyond the discursive – accounting for embodied, spontaneous, and/or unintentional cracks, ruptures, and reproductions in addition to deliberate and politicized acts and language. For

Deleuze and Guattari (1987), desire is not contained within/constrained by the discursively constituted subject. It does not begin from an ontology of lack as it does in the psychoanalytic sense (wanting or yearning for what we do not have). Rather it is "more than the actual" (Colebrook, 2002, p. 82) – the creative and productive force generated as bodies connect to preserve and enhance life. Bodies in this sense are not only human/biological, but also things, ideas, objects defined not by what they are but what they can do, what affects they produce, as they form connections/assemblages with other bodies.

As the force of these connections, desire "...is never a desire for something, but is itself material production that can be regulated just like the rest of the social field" (Olkowski, 2000, p. 190). Even as it becomes structured through coded or molar formations (institutions, identities etc.), desire continually produces ruptures that work to un-fix intelligible categories, differentiating from organization/stratification to produce new possibilities. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to such ruptures as deterritorializations. Ringrose (2011) explains:

> The notion of territorialization describes when energy is captured and striated in specific space/time contexts. De-territorialization is when energy might escape or momentarily move outside normative strata, and re-territorialization describes processes of recuperation of those ruptures. (p. 603)

Deleuze and Guattari refer to sustained deterritorializations as lines of flight, which signal processes of becoming – new possibilities and ways of being (Renold & Ringrose, 2008).

Ringrose (2011) argues that "a Deleuzoguattarian analysis offers new theoretical tools for thinking about discursive subjectification but also for mapping complex desire-flows and micro movements through and against discursive/symbolic norms" (p. 598). An analysis of desire enables understandings of girls' resistances that are not only discursive (though contain the

discursive) insofar as energy flows and affects are produced as girls enter into assemblages that disrupt, exceed, (re)configure, and/or (re)code "girl" and "risk."

Desire as it constitutes/shapes the "girl" has primarily been explored in girlhood and feminist studies in relation to the discursive silencing of girls' sexual pleasures, fantasies, and wantings within patriarchal contexts that heavily regulate female sexuality through governmentality (Harris, 2005). Fine (1988) has articulated this dominant silencing as a missing discourse of desire. More recently, McClelland and Fine (2008a) have undertaken an exploration of conditions that enable the disruption of this silencing – the spaces and moments in which girls can articulate sexuality in excess of discursive constraints, producing "hidden transcripts of desire" (p. 84). They also go further to argue that:

> *the presence or absence of desire in young women's narratives does not determine its existence*. This is a bold statement that we think will serve to discard a false binary between "missing" and "present" discourses of desire for young people [italics in original]. (McClelland & Fine, 2008b, p. 245)

While Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualize desire in a way quite different from (and even in order to subvert) a discourse of wanting, I find that McClelland and Fine's theorizing of desire moves girlhood studies in a direction of displacing understandings of (girls') desire as (only) lack(ing), in the interest of more complex and multiplicitous understandings.

This is the direction I move in as well, using Eve Tuck's reworking of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of desire:

> Desire is a thirding of the dichotomized categories of reproduction and resistance. It is neither/both/and reproduction and resistance. This is important because it more closely matches the experiences of people who, at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures – that is, everybody. Desire fleshes out that which has been hidden or what happens behind our backs. Desire, because it is an assemblage of

> experiences, ideas, and ideologies, both subversive and dominant, necessarily complicates our understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance. (Tuck, 2009b, p. 420)

This complicating of agency, complicity and resistance is a necessary critical/political move toward social justice within a socio-political context of white, neoliberalism that commodifies girls' bodies under the guise of liberation and humanist agency, while simultaneously producing "girl" through victimizing discourses. While it is Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire that enables this complexity, Deleuze (1997) himself has little use for concepts of agency and resistance, which necessitated for Tuck (2009b, 2010) a reworking of desire.

*Desire as Smart*

While Tuck (2009b, 2010) utilizes Deleuze's concept of desire to theorize the complexity of lived lives, she also explicates how her own theorizing of desire diverges from his in ways I find useful for my analysis. She explains:

> [Deleuze's] characterization of desire as wholly unconscious, and my conviction that desire is at least partially self-determined, represents a significant epistemological divide...Clearly, he makes this insistence to rescue desire from psychoanalysis, to fend off those who aim to pathologize desire; yet, I hold that Deleuze gives too much up when he says that desire is perfectly meaningless. (Tuck, 2010, p. 645 and 647)

Drawing on Indigenous epistemologies, Tuck (2009b, 2010) theorizes that desire is smart – accumulates wisdom in assemblages over generations. Deleuze's conceptualization of desire as unconscious explicates why he has no use for the concept of resistance:

> For myself, the status of phenomena of resistance is not a problem; since lines of flight are primary determinations, since desire assembles the social field, it is rather the *dispotifs* of power that are both produced by these [assemblages] and crushed or sealed off by them...I therefore have no need for the status of phenomena of resistance; if the first given of a society is that everything takes flight, then everything in it is deterritorialized. (Deleuze, 1997, p.189)

I am not willing to let go the concept of resistance *and* I find Deleuze's framing of desire useful in complexifying my reading of resistance in/through our research. In fact, I was grappling with my attachment to resistance when I encountered Eve Tuck's (2010) article "Breaking up with Deleuze" and found her writing through some of my own internal struggle – or, her wanting became my wanting too. That she wants Deleuze to say that desire is smart echoes a significant tension informing my analytical framework. Where does intention meet with Deleuze's notion of desire? Intention seems irrelevant, superfluous, if not antithetical, to the ways in which Deleuze (1997) sees desire as revolutionary. And yet for me, intention, the deliberate and necessary exercise of disruption that becomes an expansion of/into that which is not yet, is important. It is resistance. It is political. *And*, it is *also* of great utility and importance to read resistance to account for "the unanticipated, the uninvited, the uncharted, and unintended" (Tuck, 2010, p. 641). In making desire smart, Tuck's reworking enables me/desire to account for girls' resistance and agency in deeply complex ways. Also informing my analysis, Renold & Ringrose (2008) explore how girls negotiate contradictions at the micro-level in their day to day interactions necessitating a mapping of the "molecular flows" of desire in girls' lives. In the following section, I discuss the importance of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of molecularity for our analysis.

*Molecularity*

Like Tuck, Renold and Ringrose (2008) draw on the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari to complicate the dichotomy of reproduction and resistance by mapping the molecularity of girls' negotiations of power across their multiple contexts and experiences:

> Molecularity and 'molecular fluxes' offer a metaphor for looking at the minutiae through which discourse and power are reconstitutive in actions and talk, yet also malleable spaces of un-fixity...[and] helps us to value the small and often passed over spaces where regulation and resistance might meet. (Renold & Ringrose, 2008, p. 320)

Renold and Ringrose (2008) complicate conceptualizations of girls' resistance using Deleuze's argument that a molar theory of revolutionary resistance or change is futile and obscures the "molecular flows and disruptions which signal moments of deterritorializations, becomings, and lines of flight" (p. 319). Jackson (2010) explains that "...the molecular involves micro-entities, processes, creations – tiny things (singularities) that destabilize the perception of the whole" (p. 582).

In chapters 4 through 6 I endeavour to read for the molecular flows of girls' experiences – the multiple, micro-political singularities through which the categories "girl" and "risk" become destabilized. Rather than assessing the "effectiveness" of resistances in molar terms, a reading of desire acknowledges the in-between-ness, possibilities, and potentialities produced by such micro-movements. In this vein, Tuck (2010) notes that "[t]he epistemology afforded by desiring-machines is one that does not fetishize completion, closed circuits, or discrete processes" (p. 641). Thus, tracing molecular flows of desire affirms the significance of the momentary ruptures/resistances in girls' day to day lives that may become quickly recoded but leave "resonances" of something new (Renold & Ringrose, 2008). We are then better able to see more of what may otherwise go unnoticed – particularly in a dominant context where the cracks and ruptures these resistances produce are already all too easily (re)coded as pathologies, impeding any sustained line of flight. The tracing, the noticing, of these molecular flows is significant as a political move toward sustaining "alternative figurations" of girlhood subjectivities that "displace the vision away from heteropatriarchal discourses and the

phallogocentric mode" (Braidotti in Renold & Ringrose, 2008, p. 320). For me, it is a hopeful move toward more complex (and therefore more ethical) theorizing of girls' knowledges, resistances, and survival. It is to this hopeful move that I dedicate the presentation of our data and my findings in the following three chapters.

# Chapter 4: Stereotypes – Complexities, Resistances, Molecular Flows

In this chapter I present my own (cycle of) analysis of our collective exploration of a primary theme that emerged in our research: stereotypes of girls who go to alternative schools. Working from the hybridized feminist poststructural and desire-based analytical framework outlined in the previous chapter, I undertake this analysis as an ethical commitment to account for the complexities of the girls' experiences, perspectives, and knowledges. I analyze data generated through our group discussions, pictures and graffiti ("Stereotypes"/"Strengths") walls to undertake a deep reading of how the girls negotiate the stereotypes, categories of "risk", and dominant constructions of "girl" through which their multiple/shifting subjectivities are constituted and their bodies intervened upon. Through our various discussions and activities, we undertook our collective analyses of stereotypes to destabilize molar discourses that cast "at-risk" girls as deviants in relation to the self-actualizing "can do" girl who succeeds in mainstream education (Harris, 2004). A catalyst for this discussion was an article that came out in the local paper to generate awareness about and funding for the Artemis Place program. The article bothered many of the girls on our research team. As Ruth explains:

> There was an article that came out in the newspaper about Artemis Place a week or so before Project Artemis' first session. Many of the girls including myself were angry at how we were depicted in the article which was explained to us as a way to get fundraising. It generalized and stereotyped the girls and their experiences. I felt the article made us seem like helpless victims that wouldn't stand a chance in mainstream society. (Loiselle, Taylor & Donald, forthcoming)

Sarah Ahmed speaks to the politicization of constructions of pain and charity as they are mutually constituted to position the "other" as in need of help which must be extended by the

Western (white, middle class) subject – ultimately indebting the inferior "other" to white benevolence while masking the structural violence reproduced through such relations of power:

> Charitable discourses of compassion more broadly show us that stories of pain involve complex relations of power... The overrepresentation of the pain of others is significant in that it fixes the other as the one who 'has' pain, and who can overcome that pain only when the Western subject feels moved enough to give... [P]ain and suffering , which are in part effects of socio-economic relations of violence and poverty, are assumed to be alleviated by the very generosity that is enabled by such socio-economic relations. So the West takes, then gives, *and in the moment of giving repeats as well as conceals the taking*. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 22)

That is, colonial discourses of charity and care obscure the complicity of white, capitalist, hetero-patriarchy in (re)producing and benefitting from the socio-material conditions that produce contexts of "risk" and "need" for "others." As Ruth explains above ("the article made us seem like helpless victims who wouldn't stand a chance in mainstream society"), these relations of power are acute in the lives of girls in Project Artemis and "the reproduction of dominant discourses of minoritized girls as only problematic and at risk ignores their agency and limits the infusion of their complex voices into research, policy, and practice" (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011, p.105).

Girls' responses to the newspaper article generated an immediate engagement in our research with the tensions between their sense of feeling seen and valued at Artemis Place and the "at-risk" constructions that shape program funding and delivery in complex ways. Artemis Place is an alternative education and life skills program that is focused on supporting and empowering "at-risk" girls to undertake processes of positive change. Our data reveals the complex ways in which Artemis Place is implicated in both the reproduction and rupture of problematic and pathologizing discourses shaping the girls'

experiences inside and outside the program. Girls' narratives in our data frequently position Artemis Place as a site that disrupts the power structures and hegemonies of the mainstream education system and other sites of intervention in their lives. It is constructed as a girls-only alternative to mainstream schools where girls find belonging and feel valued and validated. At the same time, these alternative discourses and more empowering experiences come into tension with the ways Artemis Place (like most if not all social services embedded in the non-profit industrial complex) relies on the categorization of girls as "at-risk" in order to produce/fulfill its mandate and sustain its existence within a neoliberal social order. For instance, girls produced knowledge/analyses of the direct links between mandatory assessments, funding for the program, and the "at-risk"/"in need" designations (e.g. mental illness, substance use/abuse, behavioural problems) with which they are labelled. Anna illuminates many of these complexities in this conversation:

> Anna: Well for me I just had like had a big problem with this cuz like I read the article [about Artemis Place in the newspaper] and I was just like no I don't really want to put my face on it, you know "at-risk youth, several are dealing with drug problems" when I think there's only one person here, well we all have our problems, but there is only one person here I can think about who really has a drug problem. The rest of us, we're not really dealing with drug problems. But it's just like, it's hard not to talk about a group of people without stereotyping them, like cuz how do you describe Artemis, how do you describe the girls here without taking up three pages, you know? So I understand that, that it's hard, but you know I feel like we're a little misrepresented when it comes to you know the wording that was used.

Here, the label of "drug problem" used in the newspaper article constructs an "at-risk" "other" that Anna wants to separate herself from by effectively othering the "one person" in the program whom she perceives as deserving of such a diagnosis. In some ways, in critiquing stereotypes merely for their inability to describe everyone (e.g. where "drug problem" only describes one,

not all, of the girls), she affirms the validity of such individualizing labels with a sort of qualifier that this one does not apply to her – though "we all have our problems." At the same time she is asking for alternative language or "wording" to describe the experiences of Artemis girls. As we move into talking about girls' concerns with the assessments that are submitted with their report cards, the complexity of Anna's experience with the label "drug problem" emerges:

> Anna: I've never been so mad with a report card. Like I used to cry when I got a B, but I was so so mad at what they wrote in my report card [...] Cuz I hadn't done drugs in like six months. I was so mad. [...] Where does that information come from? Like I know that they're trying to get more funding, but they said I was a drug addicted, like "Anna continues to struggle with substance abuse." What does that have to do with my academic record? [...] like what does substance abuse have to do with how well I do in school, like my grade?
>
> Mary: Well because it would make it harder for you to do school and stuff.
>
> Anna: Still like it bothers me. Like at the time I hadn't done drugs in like six months. Like where are they getting their frickin information from you know?[...] Do they just use like my previous record and just copy and paste? It's bullshit it just pisses me off.

Anna acknowledges that drug use has been a part of her past experience *and* resists labelling that fixes her in time and space as someone with a "substance abuse problem", which effectively reduces her complex experience to an assessable behavioural problem. Malins (2004) explicates the ways in which something a body does becomes coded/stratified through the fixing of a body's identity:

> A body that smokes once becomes a smoker. A body that injects twice becomes an addict. A complex rhizomatic flow of multiplicities reduced to a single grid of social *strata*. A grid of organization and predetermination (male, hetero, alcoholic) that limits the connections a body can make with other bodies; and reduces its potential for difference. Its potential for becoming-other. However, while bodies are themselves drawn to these reassuring modes of (organ)isation, they also simultaneously repel them. (p. 87)

Anna is conscious of the relationship between this behavioural assessment and funding ("I know they're trying to get more funding"), but she questions its authority to narrate or define her experience: "what does substance use have to do with how well I do in school, like my grade?" At the same time, Mary acknowledges that drug use does affect girls' capacities to "succeed" in school. However, it is the impossibility of ridding her body of this label that pisses Anna off ("Like at the time I hasn't done drugs in like six months"). She gives us the image of "copy and paste", evoking the repetition of assessment and intervention that girls must navigate. "Copy and paste." This image serves to critique and resist the "bullshit" bureaucratic/systemic regulation and surveillance of her body, which she does not escape at Artemis Place (nor do staff or other girls), even as she and other girls simultaneously construct Artemis as an important and empowering program.

Girls' critiques emerged in many forms throughout our process, humour being a prevalent one. While short, this sarcastic interaction at the beginning of a break during a research session is powerful:

> Mary: We need to hear more from Bailey. [She says this to open space for Bailey to talk more in the second half of the session]
>
> Laura: Ya Bailey. Actually, okay so this is something that's been set up for you. This is an intervention. I've heard um I've read in the paper that you've been drinking a lot and [experiencing] sexual exploitation, you're bad at school, you're not making friends. This is your intervention – just joking (laughs).

Laura's mock intervention makes visible the ridiculousness of the reductive constructions of girls in the newspaper article and how these can be reproduced in practice to target girls' behaviours, individualizing systemic inequities and complex social problems. The girls frequently articulated resistances to the various systemic "abnormal" categorizations of their bodies and behaviours

that appeared on our Stereotypes Wall: “incapable”, “crazy”, “sluts” “violent”, “bad”, “troubled”, “criminals,” “drug addicted” etc.

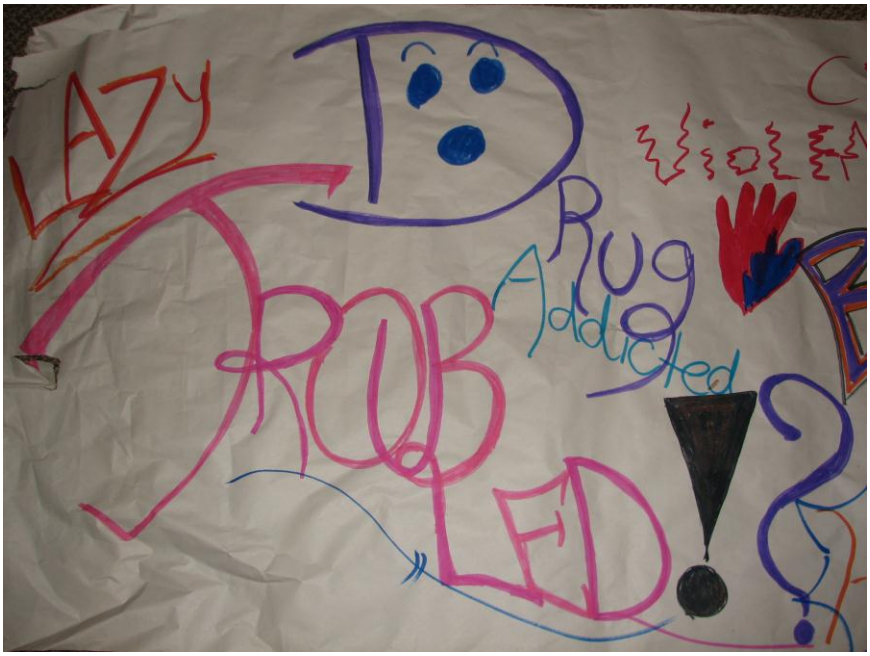


Figure 2: Troubled

The Stereotypes Wall functioned as an entry point to unpack some of these problematic labels and constructions that angered girls. Given the lively discussions we had in our first research session about the prevalence and unfairness of commonly experienced stereotypes, I was initially surprised by girls’ comments in the early part of our focused discussion about the Stereotypes Wall:

Elicia: So looking at the stereotypes wall, was that difficult to do?

Anna: I kind of take it as a joke cuz I know I’m not like that. Like it’s kind of sad that people think that. It was kind of fun just because I got to do graffiti which I never get to do.

Bailey: I don’t know. It’s just like looking at it, it pretty much says what people say about people who go to like non-public school.

> Mary: I guess it's just because I've been in this system for so long it's like it's not really, like I almost forget that people even think that kinda stuff. So like Anna said it`s kinda funny. Cuz it's like "Oh my god" that people think that. You know what I mean. I guess it's kinda far away enough for it not to affect me. I guess it still bothers me but it's not really, you know, it doesn't affect my life that much that it's hard to talk about it.

It is tempting to immediately read the girls' assertions that they "take it as a joke" and find it "kinda funny" as merely constituting another discursive contradiction when juxtaposed against the significant and painful material consequences these stereotypes produce in their lives. However, I pause in this temptation and choose to move in a different direction with the girls, one in which the humour of it all moves us outside/in-between these limitations of "at-risk" girlhood. I consider (if only momentarily) the notion that, "in truth there are never contradictions, apparent or real, but only degrees of humor" (Deleuze & Guattari in Tuck, 2010, p. 636).

This conversation can be read as resistance, a decision to find "that kinda stuff" funny in order to disrupt its legitimacy. To render these categories humorous is to render them contestable and displace their authority to fix identity. At the same time this conversation introduces a line of flight along which "girl" becomes other than, moves away from, "at-risk." Humour functions as "...the surplus of life force that exceeds the territorialized identity called into being by the dominant ideological social structure" (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 18). A flow of desire – differentiation – momentarily escaping stratification, tenuously dodging the (re)coding of their bodies via assigned categories that constrain different/other possibilities. Jackson (2010) explains that

> [w]ith Deleuze, difference is liberated from its subordination to sameness, and becoming is not a transcendent, linear process between two points. There is no origin, no

> destination, no end point, or goal. In other words, while becoming is directional (away from sameness), the movement creates something unique and particular *within* that would render the entire category imperceptible. Becoming, then, is immanent to (not outside of) the social field to which it applies. (p. 581)

Through the decoupling or un-anchoring of "girl" from the writing on the wall – a line of flight lifts off the large, smooth piece of paper covered in colourfully rendered, disparaging, gendered, and classed labels.

Desire is produced through an assemblage of human and inhuman bodies: an expansive sheet of newsprint, the Group Room wall, masking tape, Mr. Sketch markers, girls' hands and bodies, my body, a research question ("what stereotypes do girls experience because they go to an alternative school?"), pop music blaring in the background, and more. Through this assemblage, the stereotypes wall simultaneously de- and re- territorializes the "risky" body of the girl (the naming/reterritorializing of stereotypes through this method is politically motivated to resist/deterritorialize them through our critical coming together.) As Tuck (2010) notes, "[i]t is desire's nature of being unresolved and self-incompatible that makes desire *productive*" (p. 640). That is, the simultaneity of reproduction and resistance, the speed at which ruptures are created and recoded, is all part of how desiring machines work by breaking down. In the following sections I explore conversations about particular stereotypes through the molecular fluxes of girls' negotiations. These interactions produce momentary ruptures that, as Tuck notes, accumulate – leave traces of alternative figurations even when desire flows become reterritorialized through molar discourses of neoliberalism.

*Crazy, Lying, Sluts: Hetero-femininity, Sexuality, and Desire*

In the sections that follow my analysis moves through three stereotypes/constructions that emerged as significant in our data: crazy, slut, and liars.

*Crazy*

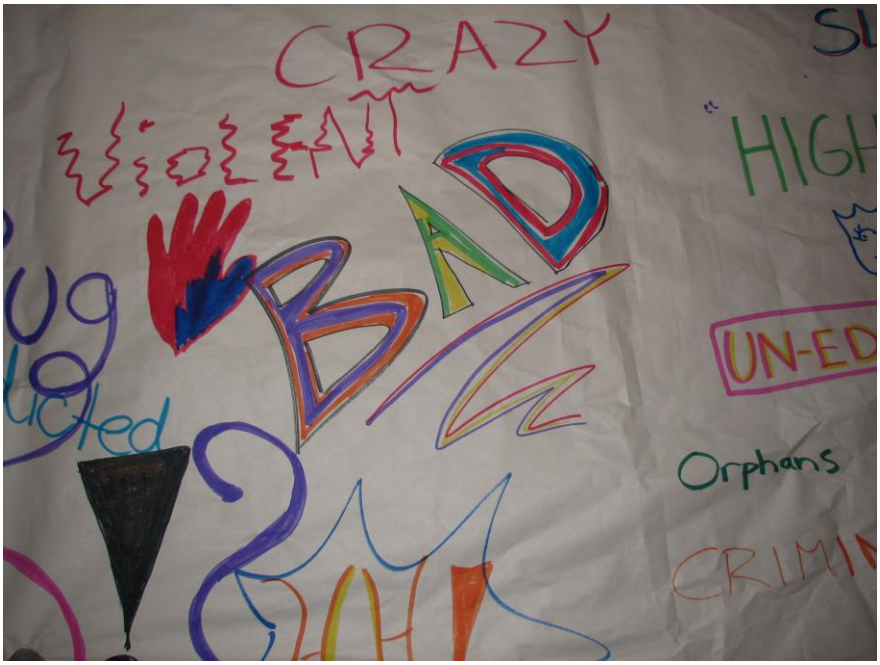


Figure 3: Crazy

Elicia: What's changed for you in your life good or bad or whatever since you came to Artemis?

Laura: I know I don't have to be on edge and I don't have to like I'm not crazy I'm not the way I was the first year [at Artemis Place] [...] I'm not like a rebel without a cause anymore

Elicia: Now you're a rebel with a cause?

Laura: No like before, I think the first year of Artemis I think I was kicked out and returned like twice a month and I had a problem for no reason [...] Now I'm not I don't try to be a bad ass anymore. I'm not getting into fights every other week.

In equating being "bad ass" and "getting into fights" with being "crazy", Laura reproduces dominant discourses of girl violence and aggression as abnormal phenomena that are heavily surveilled and simultaneously trivialized (Brown, 2003). While "I don't have to be on edge" implies that there was a reason she had to be on edge in the past – a need or purpose for her "bad ass" behaviours – the discourse of the "rebel without a cause" simultaneously functions to reinforce dominant developmental narratives of youth as irrational and uncontrollable. Within this dominant paradigm, the concept of rebellion pre-empts understandings of resistance because youth are perceived to be non-agentic and lacking personhood (Lesko, 1996; Lesko, 2001a; Lesko, 2001b). Teen "rebellion" is produced via discourses of biological determinism operating through a colonial, masculinist, development-in-time episteme of linear progress. The adolescent represents an "arrested" or "savage" developmental state on a linear trajectory toward civilized (white, male) adulthood/personhood. As Lesko (1996) states:

> As in colonial discourse, descriptions of youth generally absent the constraining factors and psychologize youth: teenagers have identity crises; they are not cognitively developed; they are not sufficiently individuated; and they all act alike. All social relations with adults and institutions such as schools have been stripped away and the objectified, psychologized teens remain (p. 466).

Importantly, gender and "girl" (and intersecting constructions of race, class, ability, etc.) are further erased in this analysis, which negates the ways in which White, male youth can eventually gain access to the rational adult subject position, while no "others" are ever able to attain this status.

Every time I listen back to this interaction with Laura I re-experience myself trying to resist these limiting discourses – trying to recover Laura's resistance through my question "now you're a rebel with a cause?", an investment based largely on my experience of Laura's firm

commitment to social justice. At the same time, I cringe at the way my question implicitly and complicity assumes that because there was no "cause" Laura could name when she was a self-identified "bad ass", her behaviour then (as opposed to now) was not a form of resistance. The notion of a cause toward which one directs their rebellion or resistance is itself problematic, because it erases the complexity of what Grewal (1992) calls "scattered hegemonies" which are "effects of mobile capital as well as the multiple subjectivities that replace the unitary European subject" (in Grewal and Caplan 1994, p. 7). That is, the "target(s)" (Raby, 2006) of resistance in any given moment can be hard to identify, precisely because the structural hegemonies that shape marginalizing girlhood subjectivities operate as multiple, dispersed forces that are difficult to name, even as the material conditions they produce are acutely felt. This is apparent in experiences Laura shares later in the conversation:

> Laura: [...] Before when I was younger certain things would bother me like about women being objectified and about things that like would make me feel shitty and I wouldn't really understand why [...]and now I actually have a strong enough opinion a strong enough will to be in a big group and have people totally say stuff like that and me be like "What the fuck's wrong with you?" [...] I have more self worth and I feel like my opinion matters I guess and I learned that by going to this school by being confident in what I believe in and having someone tell me that I'm not crazy for thinking that that's wrong and I'm not crazy for wanting something to change and I'm not crazy for being mad at society and media and like you know…
>
> Elicia: And you didn't get that from other aspects of your life?
>
> Laura: Well no I was hanging out with punks. I felt like that's the way it was you know I was just some ghetto kid that you know was in trouble with the law and got into fights and you know my boyfriends were pigs and you know and went to the strip clubs and you know I thought that was all good. You know, I didn't know why I was upset when I saw those things and why I should have been mad and now I realize why. It's cuz I have the choice not to feel okay about that.

Laura asserts that "she's not crazy for being mad at society [...]." She produces a rupture in dominant discourses of appropriate heterofemininity by decoupling being "mad" from being "crazy"; her anger is not "irrational" or "inappropriate", rather it is a justifiable response to structural gender-based violence – to the systematic objectification, sexualisation, and commodification of girls' and women's bodies. Her prior discursive positioning as "just some ghetto kid" ascribes onto her body the failure to comply with normative girlhood – a "performance of [appropriate hetero-femininity] routinely required in order for [girls] to signify as "girls" (Renold, 2008). Batacharya (2010) explains that the dominant narrative of girl violence and aggression

> ...hinges on the idea that girls and women are inherently non-violent. That is, girls and women that meet the requirements of hegemonic femininity – that is, white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied – are in fact the "fairer" sex. Those that do not meet these criteria are categorized as racial and sexual deviants. When girls and women who fall within the parameters of hegemonic femininity are violent, they are cast as failed women or social deviants rather than implicated in relations of power as social actors. (p. 47)

When Laura says "I didn't know why I was upset when I saw those things and why I should have been mad" and that it would "make me feel shitty and I really wouldn't understand why," she reveals how the contradictions between the "way it is" and the way she feels produce "crazy" as a powerful, painful discursive limitation for her subjectivity. These normative discourses pathologize the body of the "deviant" girl as the *cause* of this pain/"otherness", rather than situating her pain as deeply held (bodily) knowledge – a response to/consequence of experiencing injustice. As such, not only is she seen as causing her own pain by not simply acquiescing to expected behaviours (you only have yourself to blame), but she is also held responsible for/through the social anxiety incited by her failure to comply with social norms

(Ahmed, 2004; Ahmed, 2010). Laura identifies a distinct link between coming to critical consciousness about gendered relations of power at Artemis Place, establishing a legitimate/supported claim to her anger, and experiencing a shift in her self-worth and sense of agency. While she earlier reified the dominant discourse of the "crazy" and "violent" girl toward which mass social anxiety is directed, she simultaneously reveals that girls are *made* to *feel* crazy through the embodied (and often un-nameable) consequences of neoliberal, "schizoid femininity", through which "choice operates within a modality of constraint and diversity operates within a modality of sameness" (Renold, 2008). When Laura says, "I have the choice not to feel okay about that" she seems to contradict herself in that she did not feel okay about it even when she was not choosing to not feel okay, and even when she did not know why she did not feel okay. However, her connection with Artemis Place is an assemblage that produces a different affect – a deterritorialization through which "the choice to not feel okay" becomes-other than crazy.

Mikel-Brown (2005) states that it is this "relentless overpsychologising of girls that has served to render invisible the social and material conditions of girls' lives" (p.147). In our focused discussion about the "Stereotypes wall", we unpacked systemic gendered violences that are obscured through the pathologization of girls and women who are labelled "crazy":

> Elicia: Are there stereotypes here that girls experience because they're girls?
>
> Mary: There`s more girls on medication than there are guys on medication like you know. It's like you know if girls are a certain way then they should be like, I don`t know, diagnosed with some kind of mental illness or like you know they're crazy and stuff like that. And like there's so many girls in here [at Artemis Place] that are on medications and stuff that I don`t even think they should be on [...]

> Anna: I can relate to that just because I was diagnosed with bipolar and I was taking lithium and then I chose not to take it and it's almost like the lithium messed me up more emotionally than anything just because I felt like there was no way I could change the fact that I had mood swings, so it felt like I was having 10 times more mood swings just because it felt like "oh there's no way I could control this. Only the medicine`s controlling it." But then I flushed like 200 pills down the toilet and like I don`t think I`m bipolar I just think I have a lot of stuff that`s happened in the past and I think that has a lot to do with my mood swings because certain things trigger things that have happened in the past [...] I feel like that psychiatrist was so wrong to say that I was bipolar because she labelled me bipolar as soon as I told her my mom was bipolar, that my mom had bipolar and she's like "you know 99.9% of the time it runs in the family" and shows me all these statistics and the chart of bipolar, the type she thought I was [...] like I think that just goes to show how quick psychiatrists are to diagnose and get patients out of their office and just cure it with a band-aid of medicine [...]

Mary and Anna render visible that the prevalence of mental illness diagnoses and prescription of medication for young women who are "a certain way", is deeply embedded in dominant constructions of appropriate femininity, and heavily linked to discourses of vulnerability and the "crazy" girl. Sparks (2002) identifies that the growing preoccupation with and treatment of the "aberrant" behaviours of young women are bound to a long history of oppressive psychological interventions on women justified through patriarchal logics:

> The discourse of gender sheds additional light on why medical interventions appear appropriate for teenage girls...Psychological theories of women as emotionally unstable, dependent on men, or "asking for" the abuse they experience at the hands of men are just a few of the stories spawned by gender discourse and historically influencing the treatment of women in clinical settings...Women are assigned the greatest number of bipolar, depressive, eating, and borderline personality disorder diagnoses. (p. 30)

Anna clearly demonstrates resistance to both the diagnosis and the medication prescribed on/to her by the psychiatrist. She disrupts this coding of her "mood swings" and her gendered history (things that have happened in the past) as "disorder." She refuses the discursive move that

reduces the complexities and multiplicities of her life to a molar categorization, "bipolar." As an ethical move away from such categorizations, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualize bodies not for what they are, but for what they do in connection with other bodies. The creative and productive force generated when bodies connect with other bodies is desire:

> We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 257)

Deleuze and Guattari are thus primarily concerned with the affective capacity of bodies as they connect with other bodies – "whether a particular assemblage enhances or harms each body's life force" (Malin, 2004, p. 97). Harris (2005) stresses that discourses of adolescent female desire and agency are co-opted through white, neoliberal, individualism so that "the actual bodies of young women are being commodified and these are subject to pharmaceutical interventions, costly therapies, incarceration in private detention centres and prisons, residential treatments and educational programmes" (p. 41). For Anna, the connection of her body with a "band-aid of medicine" cuts off flows of desire in that it limits rather than creates possibilities ("the lithium messed me up more emotionally than anything"). Ringrose (2011) argues that:

> we have to analyze what the affective capacities of assemblages are in political and ethical terms – are they 'life affirming' or 'destroying'? As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 444) ask 'Do assemblages have affinity with the state or with the nomadic war machine?' (p. 602)

Swallowing the pills as complicity with the capitalist, bio-medical machine articulated by Harris, produces undesirable affects for Anna. So, she flushes "like 200 pills down the toilet." Human and non-human bodies connect – body, hands, pills, toilet – to produce the flushing as an opening. The medication Anna does not want to swallow instead becomes part of an assemblage

of bodies that liberates the flow of desire – allows movement away from the categorical constraint of diagnosis toward something other: "becoming is a process that links together terms incapable of being reduced to "molar" entities – individuals, persons, and things" (Burchill, 2010, p. 87). Sparks (2002) notes that "the voices of adolescent girls may fall on patronizing ears when there is little room for girls to legitimately question some treatment recommendations" (p. 31). However, this discursive silencing is ruptured at the level of the molecular in the moment of pills flushing down the toilet, and again as that moment is relived in this conversation, and again as it leaves traces on this page. As our conversation continues, we extend the resistant energy – this flow of desire – into further analysis of classed and gendered discourses of "crazy" as they become coded through the surveilled bodies of girls:

> Elicia: And Mary you're saying that for girls there are certain behaviours that people classify as problems?
>
> Mary: Well I don't know a lot about this, but I do know there's a lot of women in mental institutions that shouldn't be in mental institutions ya know. It's like oh someone went crazy when we took her kids away ya know it's like –
>
> Anna: No duh.
>
> Mary: Ya. [...] it`s like what guys say about girls all the time, "oh they're crazy." "They're crazy" you know [...] It's like oh they [girls] go to counselling cuz they have problems and stuff like that. They need counselling they need this, they need that. Which I do believe that everyone should have some kind of counselling you know, but ya like girls get misdiagnosed.

This discussion renders visible the gendered pathologization of women who are targeted for state interventions and punished for social problems as well as the ways in which these discourses are imposed on girls: "as young women, adolescent girls find themselves simply younger targets for gender specific diagnosis and treatment for everything from emotional

distress to truancy, regardless of these problems' origins in social conditions and discourse" (Sparks, 2002, p. 30). The girls resist these discourses by deterritorializing going "crazy" as a common-sense response to having one's children removed, rather than an expression of unfit motherhood or a psychological abnormality.

In their critique of the "Reviving Ophelia" discourse proliferated by Mary Pipher (1994), Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) problematize dominant constructions of girlhood as crisis, which obscure girls' own theorizing of their experiences. The analysis I have developed thus far renders visible the ways in which girls understand and contest (in language-able and/or embodied ways) the discourses constructing them as "crazy." In the following section I analyze girls' negotiations of "slut" as a prevalent label marking/regulating their bodies.

*Sluts*

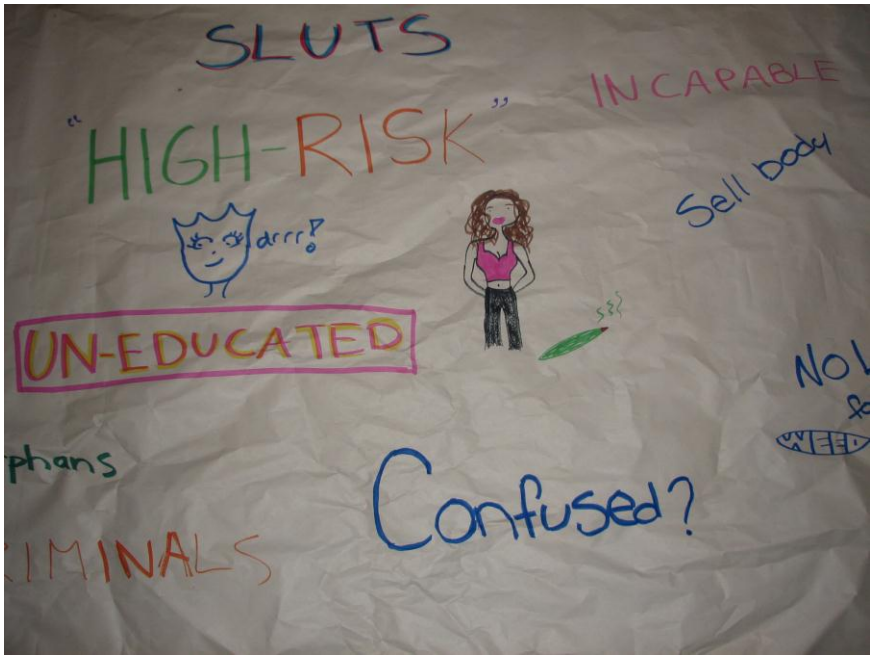


Figure 4: Sluts

The word "SLUTS" appears in capital letters on the stereotypes wall, as does a drawing of a young, white, long-haired girl with large breasts and a tiny waist wearing a top that exposes cleavage and her navel. Not far from that drawing are the words, "sell body." In the following conversation, girls discuss the discursive constraints of the slut/tease binary and the possibilities for reconfigurations of girls' (hetero)sexualities at Artemis Place:

Sam: I don't really think I change that much [outside of Artemis Place] except I watch more what I say when I'm out of the school. Cuz like here people don't really judge you so you can like say something and they're not like "oh that girl's a slut" or something.

Laura: I know a lot of girls here who have had um a few sexual partners. Like a couple of my friends who don't go here anymore and they would tell me how they slept with a few guys and it's not a big deal here, like because people who come to this school like we get taught that you're in charge of your own sexuality like it doesn't matter how many people you sleep with, that doesn't make you a whore. You know that could be a good thing. That means that you know you want several partners. You know what you want and that's a good thing. But outside of school I have a friend who used to go here and she's like "ya people call me a whore." And I'm like "What? You sound like you have tons of fun." And apparently she was called a whore outside of school. It's like totally different

Bailey: But I don't get the word for like girls are always called whores or sluts or something and then guys are just players

Laura: Ya

Bailey: I don't get why it's like that

Jade: It's not fair

Laura: It wouldn't matter okay if I say, "Fuck last weekend I slept with Bob and then I slept with Jimmy. Oh my god I had so much fun but I'm so hung over." And people would be like "Oh my god really? What happened." And then if I were to go out of this school people would be like "Oh she's a fuckin' whore, she slept with Bob and Jimmy." Or like if like before I used to get this a lot because when

> I was younger I was really frigid like that thing growing up where you have to be beautiful and you know you should save yourself for that one guy or whatever. Um I didn't want to like kiss anybody. I didn't want to touch anybody cuz you know I didn't want to do that so I was gettin' called a tease. So it's so contradictive. It's like okay, if I kiss you but don't sleep with you I'm a tease, but if I sleep with you and we're not together I'm a whore? Like okay. Like what?

Sam: I would rather be a tease than a whore, like be called that.

Laura: Ya, I'd rather be called a tease, but it is hard.

Jade: Ya it's like there's no way around it.

When Jade says "there's no way around it" she calls forward the trappings of compulsory hetero-femininity: the unavoidable binary options for girls' sexual desire and pleasure as either nonexistent (tease/frigid) or excessive, inappropriate and dangerous (slut/whore). Within dominant, Western contexts, girls' bodies are always *already* sexual(ized), rendered object and "other", as their sexualities are constituted through and co-opted by neoliberal, patriarchal forces – for instance through the post-feminist liberation of female sexuality and the mutually constituted ubiquitous hypersexualization and consumption of girls and women as objects of the male gaze (Charles, 2010, McRobbie, 2007; Renold & Ringrose, 2008). Renold and Ringrose (2008) explain that:

> In this can-do culture, girls and young women are represented as the unambiguous success stories of late capitalist societies, where discourses of choice, freedom, and autonomy coexist in a schizoid fantasy alongside the proliferation of highly restrictive and regulatory discourses of hypersexualized femininity. (p. 314)

Drawing on Irigaray's work in "The sex which is not one," Grosz (2005) articulates that female sexuality and female subjectivity hold

> either a paradoxical or an unknowable position within knowledges that seek definite categories, identities and boundaries: paradoxical insofar as it is an object that isn't one, an

> organ that isn't one, an orgasm that isn't one but that isn't none either; and unknowable, insofar as that which falls outside the grid or categories counts as nonexistent rather than as unrepresented or awaiting a different form of representation.

Indeed girls' words "I don't get it", "Like what?", "It's not fair", "It's so contradictive" produce an affect of wanting – or as Grosz suggests, a sense of awaiting a different form of representation. McClelland and Fine (2008a, 2008b) explicate how female sexuality has been historically constructed as excessive. They are concerned with the ways language, or what is allowed to be spoken by girls about their own sexualities, is co-opted by neoliberal, patriarchal agendas administered through schools and other spaces of intervention. They posit that "re-claiming this once pathologized description [of excess] might allow young female sexuality a space to emerge into – before it hits the cold air of risk prevention and commodification" (McClelland & Fine, 2008a, p. 85). They term such space(s) and the moments that engender them "release points" which may in turn be thought of as deterritorializations along lines of flight. For instance, Deleuze (1990) notes that "[i]t is language which fixes the limits (the moment, for example, at which the excess begins), but it is language as well which transcends the limits and restores them to the infinite equivalence of an unlimited becoming" (p. 3).

While the discursive constraints limiting girls' sexualities produce an affect of stuckness in certain moments, desire also expands along a line of flight, finds a release point – a crack or rupture in the strata – in moments where girls' sexualities and pleasure are deterritorialized as "tons of fun" and something girls themselves can be "in control of." In a sort of comparison of spaces within and outside of Artemis Place, girls produce a moment at the level of the molecular that allows girls' sexualities, sexual desire, and sexual pleasures to expand beyond the slut/tease binary – that is, to become momentarily unintelligible in the molar terms of available "girl"

subjectivity. Still the transcripts of desire are reterritorialized as seen in the way that language confines sexuality to heteronormative parameters invoked not only in the way "sexual partners" becomes exemplified in the hypothetical "Bob and Jimmy", as well as "save yourself for that one guy", but also that "slept with" constructs sex as a molar term that implies heterosexual intercourse by default.

This space of heteronormativity was disrupted on occasion through our discussions of sexuality, such as this conversation about the ways bisexual girls are labelled:

Tina: Bisexuals get labelled too, the "confused ones."

Mary: The confused ones (laughing)

Sam: You're on the border

Elicia: The confused ones?

Tina: Like my mom has labelled me like that like that I don't know what I like

Elicia: [Labelled you] confused?

Tina: Ya and it's like I'm not confused. I know I like both. I'm not confused. If I was confused I would be bicurious.

Elicia: And curious doesn't necessarily mean confused either does it? ...What do you think in terms of sexuality at Artemis? What happens at Artemis for girls who aren't hetero?

Sam: Well I just found out that Jenny likes girls too and I was like 'oh?!' and then we just started talking about boobs. And I didn't expect it because we were just talking about liking more than one person at a time and she was like 'ya I met a girl' and I was like, 'What? A girl? When did that happen? What the hell?' But I don't think people really care here [if girls aren't straight]

This interaction demonstrates the ways that conversations about labels can serve to reiterate labels and fix identities (bisexual is okay, bicurious equals confused), while at the same time opening space to breathe alternatives to dominant heteronormativity. For instance, Sam's recounting of a conversation with Jenny at Artemis Place, which yielded an unexpected and pleasurable (if also awkward) discussion about "boobs", momentarily displaces the heteronormative structuring of our conversation about slut – and likely many other conversations at Artemis Place that reinforce the dominance of heterofemininity.

Scholars in girlhood studies have studied mainstream schools as sites where heterofemininity and female sexuality is strictly performed and policed through the binary categories that Laura named earlier as "contradictive" (Fine, 1988; McClelland & Fine, 2008a; McClelland & Fine, 2008b; Morris, 2005; Youdell, 2005). For the girls in Project Artemis, what is a contradiction outside of Artemis is not a contradiction inside – they do not have to "watch what you say" at Artemis and can talk about sexuality outside of the tease/slut binary and, as Sam points out, you can just start talking about liking girls and boobs. As such, desire (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Tuck, 2010) allows us to access something beyond (and yet always still proximate to) the constraints of the discursive production of the girl within neoliberal, white, capitalist social structures. However these momentary cracks and ruptures easily become re-coded/captured by girl power discourse through which "in addition to being sexually confident and powerful, the new hetero-feminine subject of girl power is, ideally, a particular kind of citizen suited to neoliberal times" (Charles, 2010, p. 39). Charles (2010) gives an analysis of the layered ways in which "slut" is not only used to police hetero-femininities within the heterosexual matrix (as has been explored by other scholars studying girls' sexualities), but also works to regulate girls as

neoliberal subjects through discourses of "girl power." While McClelland and Fine (2008) found in their focus groups with young women in the United States that "only after disease prevention and victimization discourses had been dutifully narrated by the group, could pleasure poke its head into the room," such discourses of risk, prevention, and vulnerability are absent from these conversations (p. 95). Rather, what is articulated in our conversation about sexuality and "slut" is that which is "contradictive", a double-bind that emerges through critique – through the deep knowing that it should not be this way, and the unsatisfactory conclusion that "you can't get around it." At the same time, other discussions rendered visible the ways strategies such as lying can be employed to negotiate the tensions and contradictions of expectations of girlhood sexuality, as I explore in the following section.

*Liars*

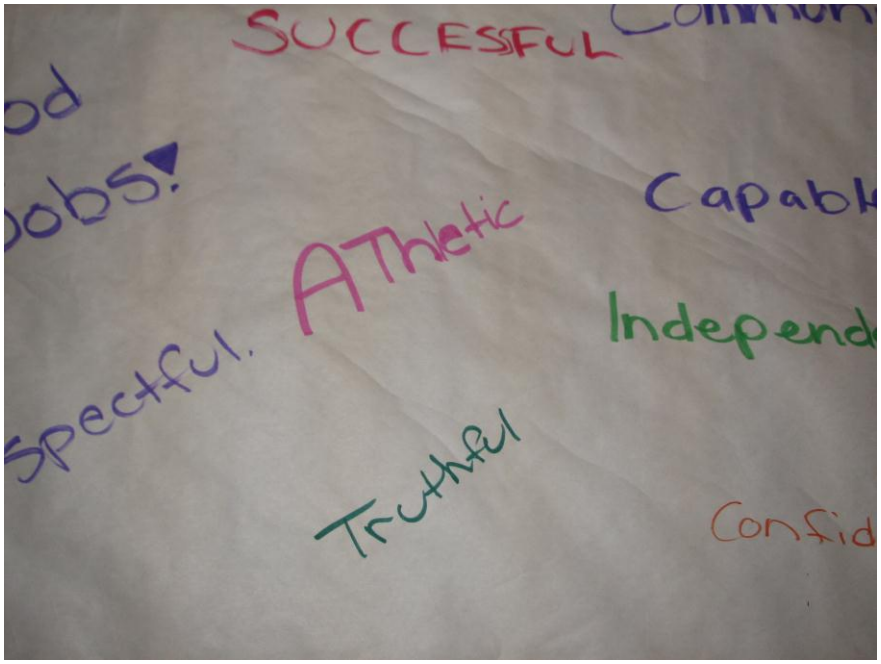


Figure 5: Truthful

While "liars" did not explicitly appear on the Stereotypes Wall it was invoked through the word "bad", as well as the word "Truthful" that was written on the Strengths Wall. As Batacharya (2010) notes "...the "bad girl" tells us what the "good girl" is" (p. 48). If it is "bad" to lie, than it must be "good" – an asset/strength – to be "Truthful." However, our data rendered visible the complexity of lying in the lives of the girls:

Laura: Ya it's like when I was younger, kay this sounds really really sad, but when I was younger all of my friends had um had oral sex or had had sex so I lied and said that I gave a guy head. I lied.

Sam: I totally did the exact same thing.
Laura: I lied. I lied because I wanted to be accepted. I'm like "Ya I did that like 5 times like god like no big deal."

Jade: I did it with drugs.

Laura: What do mean?

Jade: I'll be like oh ya I did it when I'd never even done a drug before. And now some people who I tell I've never done a drug are like but didn't you tell me you did drugs. And it's like "Ya funny thing. I was just trying to be cool" (girls laughing).

Laura: Ya and it's like, you grow up a little bit and you're like you know what I'm SO glad I lied about that. I'm so glad I said I did it. Because it's like you want to be accepted, but instead of doing it you lie about it. You know lying about it isn't the best thing to do, but I'd rather lie about it than actually do something I didn't want to do you know?

Sam: Ya.

Jade: Same.

Lying is territorialized here as something a girl must feel bad about. It is "sad" and "isn't the best thing to do." It is also an act discursively constructed as a tool of feminine manipulations. In the girls' conversation it is simultaneously deterritorialized as a tool for resistance – a means for a

girl to achieve a desired social status contingent on a specific performance (oral sex, doing drugs), without actually doing something with her body she does not want to do. This particular lie, even in its moment of resistance, then works to reterritorialize the "postfeminist masquerade" (McRobbie, 2007) of a sexually-liberated heterosexual femininity through a spoken – if not enacted - complicity. In her work on girls and resistance, Raby writes that "such accommodative practices may be experienced by the young women as resistance, but their effectiveness for creating social change is likely to be disputed and may therefore be rejected by others" (2006, p. 143). This fixed notion of resistance and requisite visible social change is problematic, and makes it that much more difficult to perceive the ongoing flux of resistance in girls' daily lives. Foucault (1990) states: "There is no single locus of refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case" (p. 96). Collectively, through these "molecular flows" that constitute the negotiation of power, the girls render visible the heaviness of contradictory discourses in their lives, and the strategic negotiations required to fit in. In this case, "good girl" status requires that a girl neither lie, nor perform oral sex. However, the material consequences of doing neither in this situation position her as a social outcast. So she makes a strategic choice.

In another research session, a discussion about the Strengths Wall generated a moment of resistance – a flow of desire exceeding reductive categorization. As stated earlier, in many ways our Stereotypes/Strengths walls served to reterritorialize girls' complex, molecular movement/flows

> Elicia: Bailey, you wrote some things on the [Strengths] wall. When do you value those things the most about yourself? Do you always think about your strengths or are there certain times when you think about them more or feel them more?

Bailey: Like I don't always think I'm respectful. Like I don't know, everybody's kind of mean at some point.

Anna: And "truthful"? [She points to the word on the wall]

Bailey: People lie about some things too right? [...]

Elicia: So you're saying that it's hard to be all these things all the time?

Bailey: Ya.

Bailey wrote "strengths" on the wall. Music playing and markers in hand, she did what all of the girls were doing. Yet, despite the way I structured my question so that she would tell me about her strengths, she moves a different way. She displaces the method, displaces me, displaces the moment. Her earnest half-statement-half -question, "People lie about some things too right?" resonates strongly with the complex conversation about lying I analyzed above. Bailey's responses in/to this discussion resist the romanticization of girls' strengths via simplistic moral imperatives to be respectful, nice, truthful etc.

My analysis of our collective exploration of stereotypes points to the importance of reconfiguring resistance through the molecular to account for the complexity and importance of momentary ruptures, such as those I have traced thus far. In the next chapter, I continue to employ this framework to analyse the emergence of feminism as a significant thread in our research.

# Chapter 5: Girl Feminism(s)? Tensions, Exclusions, Possibilities

In this chapter, I analyze girls' relationships to and tensions with feminist subjectivities, analyses, and modes of resistance, in order to understand how "feminisms" emerge as both a site of exclusion and possibility in our data. I draw on Sarah Ahmed's (1998) words to articulate that my analyses of these moments as producing feminist tensions and openings

> is not to essentialize feminism, or to turn feminism into a discrete subject. An analysis of the difference *of* feminism does not suspend an analysis of the difference *in* feminism. Writing as a feminist does not necessarily assume that the meaning of feminism is fixed in time and space. This identification has effects that are discernable – but it does not stabilise feminism into a discrete subject position. (p. 15)

In this chapter, I explore the differences *of* and *in* feminism in relation to the production of "girl" in our research. That is, I analyze certain moments (emerging in girls' ideas, experiences, narratives etc.) as "feminist" for what they do, or are intended to do, in terms of calling attention to gender inequities, resisting such inequities, opening possibilities for alternative/complex subjectivities, and/or taking up discourses of women's empowerment/ "girl power." It is not my intention or interest to define feminism or attribute feminist/non-feminist identities to the girls, rather I want to attend to the molecular movements within molar constructions of feminist/ "girl power" discourses. Although we co-constructed a critical framework for our research, we did not collectively name it a feminist research process, nor were the girls' perspectives on feminism an explicit part of our inquiry. Even so, feminist ideas and analyses continually (re)emerged in our research. Building on the previous chapter, I consider how dominant, limiting discourses of feminism, resistance, and adolescent development shape the girls' negotiations of/with feminisms, while attending to the moments/ knowledges/perspectives that disrupt these molar categories and reveal different possibilities for girl-feminism assemblages. Within the broader

theme of "feminisms", I later move on to analyze the theme of "community" that emerged in our collective analysis to explore the tensions in the complex interplay of neoliberal individualism and a sort of feminist collective politics that shape girls' understandings of community and interdependence as the foundation of individual/educational success.

*Feminism: Making Girls into Women*

> Laura: I thought I couldn't be friends with girls because they're all bitches and then I came here. […] And ya I made a lot of strong relationships with other women. Now ... I have ambitions and goals and self worth and I have a newfound feminism and I am a stronger woman by coming to this school.
>
> Anna: I totally agree with that this school totally makes you into a woman.
>
> Elicia: What does that mean to you?
>
> Anna: [To be] a woman? To be like strong and independent and able to analyze any situation that life continues to throw at you.

In this conversation about what has changed for girls since coming to Artemis Place, Laura's positioning of herself as a feminist is entwined with her positioning of herself as "woman", rather than "girl". That she "couldn't be friends with girls because they're bitches," but she is now able to have strong relationships with women and be a stronger woman, reproduces a discourse that others "girl" in relation to "woman." Anna reinforces this in her response. To be made into a woman is to be made strong and independent, presumably that which you are not when you are a girl (or perhaps more specifically an "at-risk" girl).

Eisenhaur (2004) articulates that linear theories of development permeate feminist discourses that construct girls only as future feminists, concerned with the women/feminists they will become, rather than understanding them as producers of feminisms in the now. Feminist

retrospectives on girlhoods (e.g. Wolf, 1997; Johnson, 2002) have the tendency to fix the "girl" in time. Her feminist possibilities are captured by the past and only offered a present/future through the hindsight of the "woman" she has become – through knowledges produced about, not by, her. This refusal of the present moment of "girl" as a site of feminist production reproduces what Lesko (1996) calls "expectant time" through which "youth are both imprisoned in their time (age) and out of time (abstracted), and thereby denied power over decisions and resources...[they] cannot go...forward to adulthood before their time...[They] cannot represent themselves but must be represented" (p. 456). Mutually constituting neoliberal discourses of the "can do" girl and the "at-risk" girl are gendered manifestations of "expectant time" that obscure girls' complex negotiations of power relations. Girls wanted to speak back to this erasure of their agency, so, as Ruth explains:

> We used a quote in the film and I think part of it speaks to how we felt within the process: "girls are being labelled victims of society and, by implication, passive dupes – whether or not they themselves actually feel this way". (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000, p.185 in Loiselle, Donald & Taylor, forthcoming)

At the same time, our conversation revealed how the girls take up victimizing discourses in relation to younger girls:

> Anna: [...] I think that normal schools just don't give girls, young girls especially and in today's society where sex is like I remember going to [a mainstream high school] and thinking like at 15, or even in middle school like wanting to be this sexy popular girl. Like what 12 year old thinks about being a sexy grade 6 student?
>
> Mary: Every 12 year old girl.
>
> Anna: But still it's sad you're like 12 years old and you're still a young girl and you wanna like wear a push up bra and you have no boobs like I didn't...like it was the stupidest thing. I just don't think that high school is like the right environment for young girls that like are vulnerable to wanting to be popular wanting to fit in [...]

From her previously articulated position as closer to "woman" on the linear trajectory of development, Anna constructs her 12-year-old-girl-self's desire to be "sexy" and "popular" as "sad." While she alludes to the context of high school as producing oppressive conditions for girls, she still marks the body of the "young girl" as "vulnerable."

Dominant, post-feminist discourses undermine feminism by constructing it as obsolete in a supposed era of "gender equality" and liberated female sexuality (McRobbie, 2007). These discourses produce the "future girl" (Harris, 2004) as the heavily regulated, capitalist success story, while obscuring the unequal material conditions neoliberal, capitalist systems produce for girls – and for some girls more than others. Harris (2004) explains:

> the appropriate ways to embrace and manage the political, economic, and social conditions of contemporary societies are demonstrated in the example of young women, through the ideal of the future girl. She is imagined, and sometimes imagines herself, as best able to handle today's socio-economic order. (p. 2)

Anna and Laura are denied access to, or seen as failing, the successful "future girl" discourse via their positioning as "at-risk" girls (the category through which they gain access to Artemis Place), and so instead they rely on the category of "woman", through which they can become "strong and independent and able to analyze any situation that life continues to throw at [them]."

Grosz (2005) posits that the molar construction of feminism as a linear movement toward equality, which fixes minoritized bodies/identities as the sites of struggle, limits feminism to a fixed and predetermined future, rather than opening the potential of indeterminable, transformative feminist present/futures. In many ways, it is the fixing of the feminist goal of gender "equality" that enables post-feminism to take hold under the guise that *the* (white, middle class) feminist endgame has been achieved. The Deleuzian becoming, through which "both teleological order and fixed identities are relinquished in favour of a flux of multiple becomings"

(Braidotti, 1994) enables a reconfiguring of feminist temporality offered by Grosz (2005), so that: "Feminist theory is not the struggle to liberate women, even though it has tended to conceive of itself in these terms (if this is its function it has failed miserably!); it is the struggle to render more mobile, fluid, and transformable the means by which the female subject is produced and represented" (p. 193). It is through the molecular movements of becoming that girls produce feminisms that are in continuous flux. Through molecularity, girl-feminism assemblages produce singularities that become transformative for what they enable, what they can do, not for what they are or how they are identified: an important nuance that disrupts the requirement that girls "identify" as feminists (particularly within the predetermined parameters of what constitutes a "feminist") in order to produce feminisms. Molecularity enables the emergence of feminist possibilities – desire flows – in multiple, indeterminable, and tenuous ways through girls' complex negotiations of, and material struggles in, the everyday.

*Femininity and Feminism*

While Anna's earlier comment about being made into a woman suggests that she feels she has attained this new stage of development, her comment in a later session reveals how dominant developmental and feminist discourses produce contradictions for her, as she connects a sort of feminist morality with getting older:

> Anna: I'm a hypocrite because I'm with [my boyfriend]. I know he doesn't treat me that great but I do love him – there are really good qualities [...] when it comes to my friends, I'm like "he shouldn't treat you like that." Like "why do you let him treat you like that?" […] But then when it comes to myself it's like the morals don't apply to me you know. I guess that comes with age I guess like learning that you don't want to be with that person.[…] I wouldn't call myself a feminist, but I really am in touch with my inner femininity. Like I feel like I'm glad that I'm a woman and not a man. I don't know why I just love the fact that I'm a woman. Eventually I hope I'll be able to stick to the morals

and apply them to myself.

Feminism operates here as an exclusionary category for Anna, possibly as some sort of absolute or definitive moral/righteous way of living to which she may aspire, but for which she currently views herself as coming up short. This discourse of hypocrisy is deeply intertwined with humanist notions of a coherent, rational self. Can you be a hypocrite and a feminist? Can you be a hypocrite and a girl and a feminist? While many feminists take up the project of unpacking the contradictions and complexities of our subjectivities, there is a dominant perception here that certain types of contradictions or hypocrisies are not permitted (being with and loving a boyfriend who doesn't treat you that great, while telling friends "he shouldn't treat you like that"). In addition, Anna's appreciation for her femininity has been articulated by Baumgardner and Richards (2000, 2004) as another marginalized position across Western feminisms; the feminine aesthetic taken up by "girlie girls" is read only as the co-optation of their bodies by patriarchy through discourses of post-feminist, commodified "girl power." However, Laura reveals how femininity is negotiated through complex power relations:

> Laura: When people see me they don't expect the person that I am, they expect me to be this idiot who is like a blond you know sexualized female who doesn't believe in like women's rights, she sorta just sits there and like "he he he." And then like they get to know me and like I've had a lot of issues with guys in the past because I'm so strong opinioned. I'm not what people think I am.

Laura disrupts the mainstream codification of a blond, sexualized female as an idiot – she takes up a "sexualized" aesthetic *and* is "strong opinioned" *and* believes in women's rights *and* is hyper aware of the assumptions being made about her. Her experience points to how feminist (non)acceptance of certain feminine aesthetics works with dominant gender expectations to marginalize/undermine femininity. Sexualized femininity is of course further marginalized on

the bodies of girls (particularly minoritized girls) who are often constructed either as sluts or as passive victims of patriarchy, rather than as social actors negotiating complex gendered power relations in their taking up of a feminine appearance. Laura displaces intelligible representations of post-feminist hetero-femininity through her investment in "women's rights" (notably, not girls' rights) and a refusal to make herself accessible to guys in expected ways ("I've had a lot of issues with guys because I'm so strong-opinioned"). Desire, as a "thirding of reproduction and resistance" (Tuck, 2009b, p. 420), opens space to better account for the complexity of Laura's experience. This is rendered more visible/audible as Laura shares another story that complexifies the multiple, contradictory forces shaping her negotiation of femininity and sexualization:

> Laura: I grew up in a family where looks is like you know like fitness is like a huge thing
>
> Amy : It's like number one?
>
> Laura: Ya like if you're a woman and you are not fit you are nothing. Like that's how I grew up. It's like you have to have your looks going for you. If you don't have looks you gotta have the body. If you don't have the body, you gotta be fuckin' smart, you gotta be *really* smart. You gotta have something to make it as a woman. And that's how I grew up and I grew up thinking that that's the way it was and then from my mom's side my mom got into a really bad drug habit and then she told me to kill myself and I thought rather than doing that I'm just going to be beautiful and somebody's going to take me away and all this stuff and I just went through this thing where I was just so fucked up and I like went to the hospital and it was just like at the point where it was just like, and then I got depressed and then I gained a lot of weight and it was just like, it's *so* hard [...]

Laura's story produces reproduction as resistance and vice versa. That is, Laura's negotiation of survival, "I'm just going to be beautiful and somebody's going to take me way", is produced through a very astute (feminist) analysis of the patriarchal structures that constrain her subjectivity – the limited options from which she must choose in that moment in order to "make it as a woman." Grosz (2005) states that "discourses are not just the repositories of truths, of

concepts and knowledges; they are also, and most significantly, modes of action, practices we perform to facilitate or enable other practices, ways of attempting to deal with and transform the real" (p. 158). "I was just so fucked up" could easily be read through individualizing discourses of risk and vulnerability, reproducing Laura as a victim of her family circumstances. However, I read this as a becoming-fucked-up that cannot, in this moment of Laura's counter-narrative, be reduced to molar categories of victimization, vulnerability, or risk, particularly as it assembles with her complex subjectivity as a "sexualized blond female" feminist. I read this becoming-fucked-up as a refusal to not go on, something "so hard", a flow of desire that enables a feminist present/future: "Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities" (Tuck, 2009b, p. 417). Baumgardner and Richards' (2004) tribute to the thong and validation of "girlie girl" feminism does little to account for the kinds of complexities Laura's body and its assemblages produce. Laura lives these contradictions in a very transparent way in terms of her critique of her sexualized aesthetic and her deep knowledge of the conditions that shape her negotiations, yet she frequently finds her body (re)coded as not feminist. As an affective assemblage, Laura's becoming-fucked-up opens up a feminist becoming – not a becoming "feminist" of Laura, but a destabilization of "feminism" as a molar category articulated through "girl power" and denied "high risk" girls through victim discourses.

*Feminist Exclusions*

> Sam: I don't consider myself a feminist. Like I'm all down for women's rights and I think it's wrong you know like I don't know like sexism or whatever, [...] but I think that to be a feminist you should be like out there like trying to get the word around, like I'm more of a follower not really like the "You need to do this, come on guys, let's do it!" [...] [and] show people why it's wrong and stuff. Like going

out there getting your word out there and stuff.

Despite earlier conversations through which Sam shared with the group her strong beliefs about how women should be treated, that they should not have to rely on men's opinions, and that she is very vocal when she hears or witnesses something she thinks is wrong, she does not see this as "trying to get the word out" or "show[ing] people why it's wrong." She points to a fixed and absolute concept of feminist resistance that can be clearly read and understood as such, for example, community organizing ("come on guys you gotta do this") and/or public education/ consciousness raising ("out there trying to get the word around" and "showing people why it's wrong"). She does not identify as a feminist, not necessarily because she does not want to and not because she does not believe feminism is important (I'm all down for women's rights and I think sexism is wrong), but because she feels she does not count as a "feminist." This molar construction of feminism, tied to the mobilization of women's rights and to neoliberal discourses of meritocracy and individualism, which already collude in feminist discourses of reclaiming girls' voices through participation (Harris, 2004), serves to discount Sam's production of feminist possibilities. For example, in this conversation, Sam did not see her participation in our action research project and her desire to advocate for girls in the community as either feminism or activism. At the same time, her contributions to our collective analysis and social action are part of a collective piece of knowledge that speaks to girls' complex critical engagement with challenging patriarchal forces shaping their lives.

I am left with what I consider important questions about feminism and resistance that are integral to girl-centred, feminist, PAR and community work. Does doing feminism require girls to comfortably assert a feminist identity – to say I call myself a feminist? What pressures does

this place on girls to articulate a coherent, unified, feminist self? How does this reproduce the constraining discourses of normative girlhood and girl power? How does it simplify girls' complex positions across multiple, contradictory discourses and histories? And, how do we value the critical and complex contributions girls offer to feminisms if they do not position themselves as feminists and/or they are not linked to explicitly feminist grassroots movements? Further, how do I and we as adult feminist researchers and/or community workers take up a feminist practice that is not just about interpreting girls' worlds through our own feminist lens, but rather takes feminism as a concept collectively produced through our work with girls whether or not we name it feminism in the moment?

*Desiring (as) Community*

So far, I have analyzed how neoliberal discourses of development and post-feminism, as well as molar concepts of feminism that exclude girls, interact with complex negotiations of/with feminism that open up at the level of the molecular, particularly as shared in L's narratives. I will now move to explore the theme of "community" at Artemis Place as a site of tensions – possibilities and exclusions – produced through complex assemblages with discourses of capitalist, neoliberal individualism, and dominant and alternative discourses of gendered/ feminist collectivity, belonging and sisterhood.

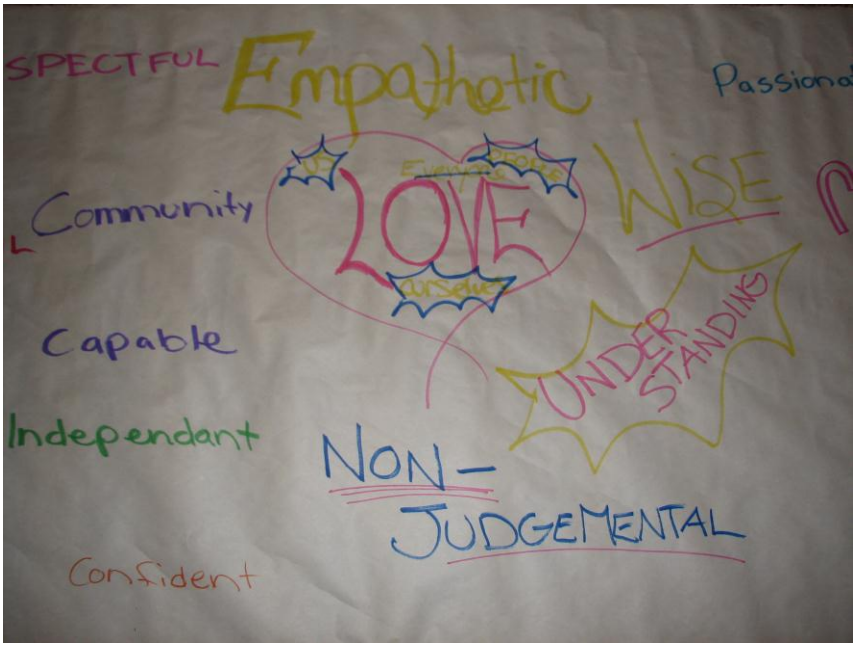

Figure 6: Strengths wall - community

Ruth: The reason why we why we love the feeling of being [at Artemis Place] and being around supportive people is because that's the way that humans are supposed to live together. And we're supposed to be supported and supportive of one another. We're supposed to feel like we have a family and an outer family you know that we can go to. And through, I guess, colonization, industrialization, the whole education system has kind of taken that away from us, you know, and that's why we're so eager to want to be in a place like this (Project Artemis, 2009).

Sarah: Artemis is like a sisterhood [...] When you come here all the stereotypes get ripped off [...] You're all like a unit (Project Artemis, 2009).

Taken from our film, Ruth's quote provides a succinct analysis of the theme of "community" that emerged strongly in our data as both that which makes Artemis Place work with and for girls and that which is lacking in mainstream education. Her words simultaneously produce affects of hope and connection ("we love the feeling of being here", we are "eager to want to be in a place like this") and loss (this has "been taken away from us" by hegemonic forces that systematize education at the expense of our humanity). She contests the notion that

girls only end up at Artemis Place because they are "incapable." As discussed in Chapter 4, our analysis rendered visible the ways in which girls are constructed as "in need" with this individualized "need" coded as deficit and the subsequent intervention/support coded as charity. Ruth displaces these discourses by naming the failures of the education system and disrupting the "naturalness" of neoliberal individualism. She articulates "the feeling of being [at Artemis Place]" as an ethical affirmation of the connection of bodies with other bodies in order to enhance life, "supported and supportive of one another." Ruth's analysis evokes what Braidotti (2009) terms "affirmative politics", which "entails the production of social horizons of hope, while at the same time doing critical theory, which means resisting the present" (p. 42). Both Ruth and Sarah find connection, relationship and belonging at Artemis Place that they did not experience in the mainstream school system.

At the same time, taken together, Ruth's assertion that Artemis Place effectively realizes this ethical ideal of togetherness and Sarah's construction of Artemis Place as "sisterhood" and "unit", serve to obscure the ways in which community at Artemis Place (and "community" in general) is a site of multiple tensions. In part, the notion of sisterhood functions here as a homogenizing discourse that erases differences across girls' experiences and concomitantly produces exclusions in our analysis. Girls construct Artemis Place as a space that validates and values their difficult life experiences, and they simultaneously produce an underlying assumption of sameness, or at least similarity, across their experiences as a marginalized group:

> Sarah: All of us, I'm pretty sure, are sick and tired of being judged. So you put a bunch of judged people together and it creates a good community, I think, just because like you all have a common pain I guess of being judged by society or feeling like society hasn't accepted you the way you are. And then you come here and it's like there is no judging, there is no accepting, you just are.

The mandate of Artemis Place as a program that serves the most "at-risk" girls in Victoria is aptly re-coded by Sarah as putting "a bunch of judged people together." Her statement that it creates a good community points to the constructedness of community, as (at times tenuous) alignments/ connections (you all have a common pain) produced through desire. As Ahmed (2004) puts it:

> ...what attaches us, what *connects* us to this place or that place, to this other or that other is also what we find most touching; it is that which makes us feel. The differentiation between attachments allows us to align ourselves with some others and against other others in the very process of turning and being turned, or moving towards and away from those we feel have caused our pleasure and pain. (p. 28)

That is, pain and pleasure are powerful forces in the coming together, the connection of inhuman (this place or that place) and human (this other or that other) bodies. Sarah articulates that the experience of being judged negatively by society unites girls at Artemis Place – a space where there is no judging or accepting. This, she asserts, creates a "good community" where girls can just be. In our film Sarah explains that "at Artemis the stereotypes get ripped off", which is voiced over footage of herself, Kelsey, and Lizz doing an impromptu dance to Michael Jackson's "Thriller" in the academic room of Artemis Place. This image produces an affect of syncopated togetherness that aligns with Sarah's affirmation of community. As Sarah talks in the voice over about the divisive cliques in mainstream schools, we watch these girls, spontaneous and playful with one another: Lizz with her studded leather jacket, fishnet stockings and suspenders and Kelsey in her sporty attire continue to dance with each other in an unlikely and heart warming assemblage. The slow motion frames of Lizz's suspenders flapping at her sides as she and Kelsey laugh, smile, and move their bodies, completely out-of-sync, sustains this affect. This

image produces community as sisterhood – a surge of affirmative energy between girls' bodies, the screen, and the viewer. I am/we are drawn in.

At the same time, the complexity of community is rendered visible in our data as different kinds of (dis)alignments emerge, often simultaneously. While experiential knowledge of negotiating "at-risk" constructions serve the purpose, as Sarah described earlier, of aligning girls with each other (via their pain and the interventions they will receive), our data also shows moments where these constructions serve to align girls against each other via the differences in their experiences. This was exemplified in Chapter 4 when Anna positioned herself (and the rest of the girls) against the one girl in the program she perceived as having a drug problem. Additionally, one of the many messages girls critiqued in the newspaper article about Artemis Place was its statement that girls in the program experience sexual exploitation. A few of the girls responded by stating that they did not appreciate the statement because *they* did not have that experience and it made it sound like *all* of the girls in the program did. One of the girls asserted: "It makes us all sound like prostitutes. *I'm* not a prostitute." Even though "other" girls at Artemis Place may experience sexual exploitation, girls were more invested in distancing themselves from *those* girls than in critically exploring the systems that create conditions for the sexual exploitation of girls. This distancing was likely the most readily available option for resistance in that moment. However, as a consequence, girls who experience sexual exploitation are effectively excluded from the "sisterhood" via this conversation. While constructed as inclusive, our data renders visible how sisterhood is mediated by powerful structural forces that can render differences within a "sisterhood" invisible, problematic, threatening, undesirable, etc. Grosz (2005) explains that:

> *Deleuzian* desire...functions as a primarily mobile and mobilizing impetus, a force of connections: of those conjunctions and disjunctions that form provisional "entities" and groupings, not so much functioning "against" power as entwined in modes of stratification and territorialisation and deterritorialization. (p. 193)

The tensions I have analyzed complicate the notion of Artemis Place as "unit", revealing how the macro structural forces that produce the non-profit industry and helping professions (and their policies, practices, and funding structures) are powerful components of the community assemblages – the desiring machines – that function in the program.

*Change is Possible at Artemis Place*

The provisional and complex force of desire as "community" emerged strongly in our data, assembled in messy entanglements with capitalist forces that work to re-code girls' bodies in terms of neoliberal individualism:

> Elicia: So you really want to convey the change you've undergone since you've been here?
>
> Anna: Ya, that change is possible. Cuz I think a lot of people treat you like you're not going to change. Like that if you grew up on welfare you're going to end up on welfare or that's where you belong, that's your social ranking so you better stay there. But here [at Artemis Place] change is possible.

That "change is possible" at Artemis Place produces a discursive alternative for Anna that allows her to move away from the molar configuration of being on welfare as a fixed identity or "social ranking." At the same time, Artemis Place is positioned as a place where girls can transcend "social ranking" through a process of supported individual change, obscuring the structural forces that produce and maintain conditions of poverty in girls' lives. The change that is possible becomes co-opted by the ideal neoliberal girl subject for whom education opens all doors and who, Charles (2010) notes, is "self-determined and responsible for managing her own economic

security and well being" (p. 39). At the same time, *how* she manages these things determines her status as "can do" or "at-risk". For instance, the photo below was taken by Amy during our Photovoice exploration to draw attention to the tensions between education as a means of improving her future possibilities and minimum wage employment as a means of sustaining herself in the present:

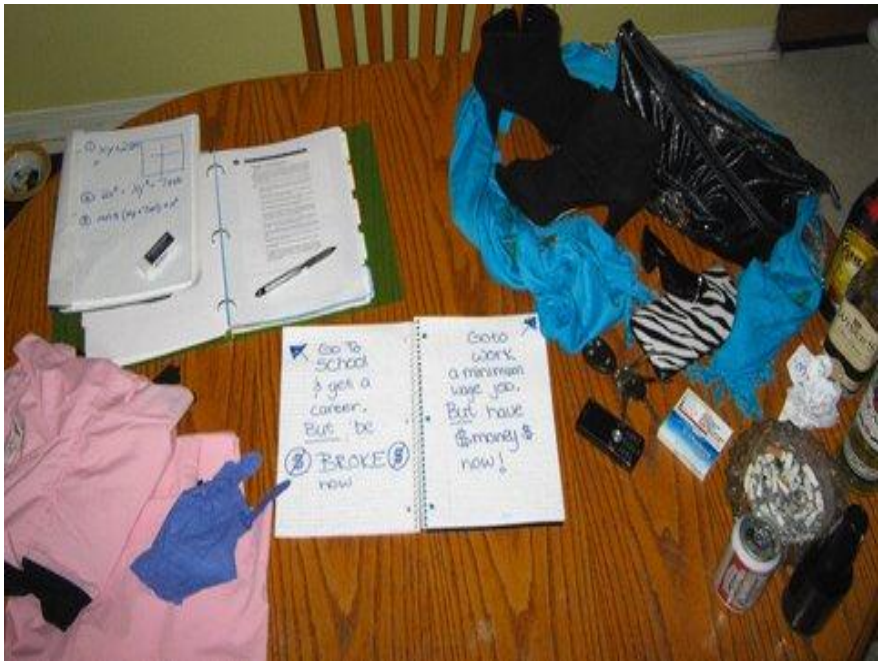


Figure 7: School or work?

*Left side: "Go to school and get a career but be broke now." Right side: "Go to work a minimum wage job but have money now."*

This photo reflects both the consumer culture demands of normative (middle class) girlhood, as well as the reality that Amy (like several girls on the research team) was living independently on government assistance and needed to work to provide for herself outside of her most basic needs. She left school at Artemis Place half way through our research project to work full time, which positions her outside of upwardly mobile "can do" status. Still, the promise of educational and career possibilities engendered by the program was a salient factor in several of the girls'

investments in the Artemis Place community. For instance, Bailey says, "Like when I wrote "good job" [on the Strengths Wall] I was thinking like there's a point when I'm going to find a good job like at the end because that's what we're working for [at Artemis Place]." When she says "that's what we're working for", Bailey invokes a sense of community and collective purpose, maybe even an "affirmative politics" of "we're in this together" (Braidotti, 2009). However, the end goal of getting a good job is discursively and materially bound to the demands of capitalism that create marginalizing conditions for (poor) girls and women.

> Post-feminist neoliberalism is pro-capitalist and hence it considers financial success as the sole indicator of the status of women. Social failure is accordingly perceived as a lack of emancipation, which implies that social democratic principles of solidarity are misconstrued as old-fashioned welfare and support and dismissed accordingly. The post-feminist master narrative reintroduces the syndrome of the 'exceptional woman', which was in place before the women's movement introduced more egalitarian principles of interconnection, solidarity and teamwork. The pernicious part of this syndrome is that it fosters a new sense of isolation among women and hence new forms of vulnerability. (Braidotti, 2006, p. 45)

The "isolation among women" that Braidotti notes seems to be displaced for many girls through the community philosophy fostered at Artemis Place, and the various/multiple assemblages/collectivities produced in that space. This is reflected in our data, as four of the girl co-researchers spoke some iteration of "hating girls" and not being able to be friends with girls before coming to Artemis Place where they developed close relationships with other girls and women for the first time. Further, the productive force of girls' connections, of being "supported and supportive of one another", becomes co-opted as (some) girls are able to take up and/or are turned into neoliberal capitalist success stories – discourses which allow them access to sites of privilege and mobility from which they have been previously excluded:

> Sarah: Artemis has changed my life, my whole perspective on life. I really had minimal goals for what I could be in life. I didn't really strive to be the best I could be. I thought only about what I could potentially be at that point in time. My views change because Artemis taught us self value[...] The more you love yourself the harder you want to strive to be a better person, a better being. I'm just amazed that I'm going to college now like [...] I never thought I was the cookie-cutter type to do that and now I'm doin' that and it feels great (Project Artemis, 2009).

Ruth also appears in the video as the first girl to graduate from Artemis Place with her grade twelve diploma. At the same time that girls identify and critique the systemic exclusion and structural inequalities produced through mainstream education systems, it is important to them to be and be seen as successful students who can go on to post-secondary programs. These stories in our film can produce a reading that depicts Artemis Place as a program that turns "at-risk" girls into "can do" girls – though this is a misreading of the complexity of girls' perspectives. Still, it is also important to recognize what is invisible in this story of successful change, and what is largely under erasure in our data – white privilege and structural racism. Sarah and Ruth are able to gain upward class mobility through educational success that is facilitated by white privilege. Whiteness as an invisible force in girls' negotiations of community and neoliberal individualism is discussed in the following section.

*Community as a Whitening Process*

So far I have discussed community as a force of connections that is not an essential or pre-given entity, but that emerges in our data as a (provisional) coming together of bodies. I have analyzed how "sisterhood" is a site of multiple tensions that serves to disrupt the isolation and exclusion of girls who have been disenfranchised across multiple contexts of their lives, while simultaneously reproducing often invisibilized exclusions for some girls. Discourses of community and belonging, as they show up in our data, overshadow structural racism,

heteronormativity, and dominant whiteness that function through everyday interactions. It is important to recognize that "whiteness" is not merely a description of skin colour, rather it is a paradigm with "profound power and exclusionary privilege" (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 168) that (re)produces the supremacy of white, patriarchal institutions and systems of thought, marking racialized (classed, sexed, gendered, etc.) "others" as "abnormal", worth/less, and in need of help. Whiteness is invisible because "it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal" (Dyer, 2002, p. 12), particularly to White people who are not marked as "Other."

As I articulated in Chapter 2, analyses of racism and whiteness were largely absent from our process. While inconsistent and infrequent, there were a couple of research sessions in which we unpacked racism and neo-colonialism via the personal experiences shared by the Indigenous co-researcher on our team (who was the only visibly non-White co-researcher). However, these conversations only happened in the sessions when this young woman was present, and only through analyses of particular moments she experienced or particular labels that targeted her as a racialized "Other". This practice was/is contrary to what I know: that it is inadequate and also unethical to rely on racialized members of the research community to bring their experiences forward in order to undertake these analyses – particularly in spaces like ours, which was dominated by White co-researchers (including myself). The following conversation renders visible how whiteness functions so that Artemis Place as a space in which "you're all like a unit" and "you just are" and "you all have a common pain" may not be the case for all girls.

> Tina: I remember I went to get a slurpee and I had the cops pull me over because it was just after three Native girls took a lady's purse downtown, and then I was walking to 7/11 and I got pulled over because I was Native and they had to ask me for my information and everything and they just made me stand there and wait [...]
>
> Elicia: So why is it okay for police to do that?

Sam: Because if you fit a suspect character they have to do everyone.

Elicia: If it was three white girls who robbed from a store?

Mary: They wouldn't stop every white girl. They wouldn't.

Sam: Well if say they were looking for a blond, a red head and a brunette
Mary: I feel a joke coming on

The excerpt above acutely reveals the ways in which neoliberal, multi-cultural discourses simultaneously produce Tina as hypervisible, heavily surveilled, and criminalized racialized "other", while enabling and obscuring structural racism under the guise of equality ("if you fit a suspect character they have to do everyone"). Sam relies on the same discourse of meritocracy that enabled Sarah and Ruth's movement into "can do" girl status – the discourse of "you get what you deserve." Even as Mary contests Sam's assertion that the police are just doing their jobs, her comment "I feel a joke coming on" functions to trivialize Tina's experience. Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) argue, it is those young women "who lack the resources to stay out of view of the criminal justice system who are targeted and criminalized, resulting in spiraling arrest rates for girls of colour" (p.50). The material consequences of structural racism Tina experiences as she moves around Victoria are both silenced and reproduced in this conversation and in the broader context of our data as it constructs the Artemis Place "community."

That nearly all of the co-researchers in the project (including myself) are white except Tina creates significantly uneven power relations. Sam's response points to the ways in which whiteness and the privilege it affords poor, white girls shapes their analyses of the structural violence experienced by racialized girls, and produces a sense of entitlement to comment on and make jokes about racism at Tina's expense. At a later point in this research session we come

back to this conversation to talk about racial profiling and Mary suggests that we stage a scene in our film depicting a racist police officer stopping a girl walking home from work. This suggestion is motivated by the aim to be inclusive (which is tied to neoliberal discourses of diversity), however it reduces the systemic forces of whiteness and racism to an "isolated incident" (attached to Tina's body and located within her experience). Whiteness then functions in this conversation to "other" Tina, and preclude analyses of systemic racism as well as any need for the white co-researchers (including myself) to undertake analyses of their/our own privilege in this moment and in the space of Artemis Place.

Because we did not consistently interrogate whiteness across all of our experiences and within our research process, we reinscribed "othering" discourses by interrogating racism only as attached to the experiences and the body of one co-researcher, and we reproduced the hegemonic invisibility of whiteness by not exploring our own complicity in reproducing (and, for most of us, benefitting from) racist, white power structures. Disrupting whiteness should be an integrated part of the critical lens researchers bring to PAR, and ours was only partial at best. It is not easy and has to be deliberate precisely because whiteness is so ubiquitous – always constituting and constituted through our PAR practices. Taft (2007) refers to her focus-group and interview based research with White girls as "a space of racial silence", explaining that her questions about race made visible the "abnormality of speaking about race in largely White spaces" (p. 213-214). As a White researcher, she goes on to explore some of the complexity of such conversations in research:

> …my questions about race placed me, an assumed racial insider, suddenly outside the norms of typical White behavior. By speaking race, I broke the rules of normal White-on-White interaction and indicated to these girls that although we were all White, I was doing whiteness differently. However, it was also my hope that even if my questions

> were unexpected, they were not overly threatening or uncomfortable and that girls did not interpret them as accusations about the lack of racial diversity in their social lives, because I too (as the girls knew) had grown up as a White girl in the area. (p. 215)

Here Taft indicates how disrupting whiteness is necessary and difficult to do in a way that opens the conversation up to everyone without alienating White co-researchers/participants or re-othering racialized co-researchers/participants.

The gaps in our analyses of whiteness render visible the ways marginalization was centred in our process, while privilege remained hidden. Girls unsurprisingly were not choosing to inquire about what many of them perceived to be outside of their personal experience – for example, racism – even though all of our gendered and classed subjectivities are constituted through structures of dominant whiteness (e.g. while being poor marks White girls as outside of normative girlhood, being White works to mediate violence in how they are marked and targeted). Our research into the structural inequities girls negotiate focused only on unpacking their experiences of and responses/resistance to marginalization. Within such a framework, it can become difficult to interrogate sites of privilege that interlock in complex ways with oppressive structures. This is not a new dilemma, as it has been well analysed, for instance, in critiques of Western feminism (e.g. Mohanty, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983) that developed as a White, middle-class, women's movement seeking gender equality and an end to (some/privileged) women's oppression.

Analyzing "community" through our data must account for the ways the construct of the "unit" can serve to flatten difference under the guise of commonality – we are all different in the same ways (e.g. we all go to an alternative school and have been labelled "at-risk"), so we are all the same, with a "common pain." I have explored through our data the emergence of

"community" as desire – a force of connections – that enables transformation. Sarah Ahmed (1999) provides an important critique of how transformation is mediated through power relations: "...the 'moving beyond' the discernability of subjects is in itself implicated in the writing of a certain kind of subjectivity; a subjectivity that can move, that is unfettered, and that has the privilege of fluidity and transformability" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 56). That is, becoming "unit" negates the racist structural violence that produces uneven access to the kinds of transformation and "success" the girls attribute to the Artemis Place community. This analysis does not negate the importance of community in the lives of the girls, including Tina who articulated a sense of belonging at Artemis Place that she did not have in her other schools. Rather, it serves to complicate and magnify the messy, tenuous constructedness of "community." It also reaffirms the importance of enacting critical praxis to account for difference in the formation of an "affirmative politics" of connection and collectivity that produces "social horizons of hope" (Braidotti, 2009). As Tuck (2009b) notes, "[w]ithin collectivity, recognizing complex personhood requires making room for the contradictions, for the mis/re/cognitions, usually in an effort to sustain a sense of collective balance" (p. 421). The "making room" involves a commitment to naming invisibilized structures of whiteness and colonialism in the coming together across difference. While such practices were lacking in our research process, it is important for me to name these gaps and erasures here and to acknowledge that, while our data is (in many ways) static, I have continued to work through these tensions in the multiple sites of research, practice, and activism in which I am engaged, including my conversations and collective writing with some of my co-researchers from this study.

There is no easy segue from these tensions to the next and final chapter of my findings, in which I follow a line of flight along affective/performative flows of desire that emerged in our process, producing humour and creativity as critical praxis.

# Chapter 6: Desire as Satire – Affective/Performative Resistances

In this chapter, I follow a line of flight in my analysis, moved by data that shifted an ordinary moment in a research session into a moment of "ordinary affect" (Stewart, 2007) – laughter, levity, and spaciousness. Stewart (2007) explains that "ordinary affects"

> work not through "meanings" per se, but rather in the way that they pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds. Their significance lies in the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible. The question they beg is not what they might mean in an order of representations, or whether they are good or bad in an overarching scheme of things, but where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance. (p.14)

I am compelled to write this chapter because one day as I was listening through our data recordings, mired in heavy and mixed emotions about "writing up" the complexity of the girls' lives, I suddenly found myself laughing out loud, eyes tearing up, muscles releasing. My previous moment of anxiety spontaneously dissipated. I had stumbled across a forgotten conversation, an important conversation. It was my coming into connection again with this conversation (in which the girls and I brainstormed themes and concepts for our documentary film) that shifted not only my/the energy in the moment of listening, but also incited me to extend the theoretical framework I was using for my thesis. In many ways this conversation pushed (maybe pulled) me toward the desire-based analysis I eventually developed through this thesis, so that I could undertake a more textured and nuanced engagement with our findings that would attend to the hope and creativity of these moments in our collective process. In the sections that follow, I explore the ways in which this conversation produced (and continues to

produce with each reading/listening) an affective/performative queering of the limited girlhood subjectivities that emerged in other parts of our research, reconfiguring resistance through desire.

*Desire as Satire: Performativity and/or Line of Flight?*

*Bodies re-enter the door at the back of the room, bringing the wafting scent of cigarette smoke in from the parking lot. The bodies and the dissipating smoke move slowly through/with/as the lethargy of the near-end of the school day. The five girl co-researchers attending today's research session settle back into the comfy chairs and couches in the life skills room after our ten minute break. I have just finished taping a fresh sheet of paper to the wall. The group does a little check-in and I dive into our agenda for the rest of the session. Do we all want to make a film? Pros and cons? Yes, consensus. Some talk of themes to cover: community, belonging, stereotypes of girls in alternative schools. The marker squeaks on the flip chart paper as our "brain storm" moves more like a slow breeze that wants to lull us all gently to sleep. Then,*

Mary: I have an idea

Anna: Let's hear it

Mary: Well it depends on how comfortable people are and you don't have to, but like –

Laura: We all pose naked, *she interrupts with a sudden burst of energy backed by a playful tone*

*The group breaks into laughter and without warning or ceremony, a moment that seems to push just slightly past something else, like something is being traversed and you can feel electricity buzzing softly under your skin, then rising to the surface to breathe, pop, expand – as laughter, as sarcasm, as satire. Our conversation suddenly takes on a rhythm markedly different from the lethargic moments preceding it*

Anna: I'm down

Mary: Ya and we slowly eliminate people like in America's Next Top Model

Laura: Peg them off [laughing continues]

Elicia: That sounds like a real Artemis community building activity [laughing, sarcasm]

Mary: Exactly

Laura: We could do what people think that all girls schools are all about, we could all like be in bed like in little nighties and like hit each other with pillows.

Anna: Like LiveLinks or something "Call now to join our school" [low, husky voice].

Laura: Ya "we have sleepovers" [low, husky voice].

Mary: Oh my god.

Laura: "We do naughty things" [low, husky voice].

Elicia: Okay Mary where were you going with this? [laughing]

Through this moment of satire, desire moves through and beyond the molar construction of girl/woman as sexualized object. The types of dominant media representations being satirized are those that produce "bi-sexual/lesbian" encounters for the consumption of the (white, heterosexual) male gaze and thus reproduce hegemonic hetero-femininity. As the girls noted in a previous session:

Tina: It's like [in society] it's okay for girls to be gay cuz it's hot but it's not okay for guys to be gay because it's disgusting.

Mary: Well it depends on like [if they're] hot girls.

Sam: Like lipstick lesbians.

Yet, in our brainstorm, the "lipstick lesbian"/bisexual male fantasy is displaced somehow – in the absence of the male gaze she is barely there. Here, she becomes something different/other even as she remains proximate through the enactment of satire: the low, husky voices "call now", "we do naughty things", "we have sleep overs." Girls' bodies and the spaces between them connect with, reproduce and subvert dominant representations in the becoming-queer of this moment. As

I use it here, "queer" is a "vital force" in its "capacity to produce deviant lines along established thinking...to undermine the self, to resist any normalisation" (Nigianni and Storr, p. 1). However, it is produced through and productive of complex assemblages and desire flows – it is implicated in simultaneous reproduction and resistance:

> Queerness as an assemblage moves away from excavation work, deprivileges a binary opposition between queer and not-queer subjects, and, instead of retaining queerness as dissenting, resistant, and alternative (all of which queerness importantly is and does) it underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations...[it also] enables attention to ontology in tandem with epistemology, *affect in conjunction with representational economies*...[emphasis my own] (Puar, 2005, p.121-122)

The heavy burden of negotiating and resisting sexualisation discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 differentiates here in the moment we simultaneously break into laughter when Laura says "We all pose naked." While the representational economies that constitute the "girl" subject do not disappear, affect takes us beyond the subject, even as we are looking and speaking back to her. Freed from "the particular observers or bodies who experience them [...] affects are sensible experiences in their *singularity*, liberated from organising systems of representation" (Colebrook, 2002, p. 22). The electricity, the levity – the newness – is produced in the room through connections of bodies, like a moment of "ordinary affect" described by Stewart (2007):

> As if the singularity of the event has shaken things up, lightening the load of personal preoccupations and social ruts. As if everyone was just waiting for something like this to happen. A "we" of sorts opens in the room, charging the social with lines of potential. (p. 22)

This collectively imagined plot of our film begins with the sarcastic suggestion that we "peg them [each other/ourselves] off" one by one, satirizing the post-feminist, neoliberal, capitalist premise of America's Next Top Model – calling into the room the same neoliberal, meritocratic/survival-of-the-fittest logics through which the girls have been dispossessed of

education and personhood. These logics are called into the room for the purpose of laughing at/in spite of/ in tandem with them. There is resistance and complicity in this move. After all, several of the girls (and I) know America's Top Model well because they (we) watch it – consume it as they (we) are consumed by it. At the same time there is a rupture, a cracking through the mere representation of dominant images. For instance, think of the audience for this potential LiveLinks ad for Artemis Place ("Call now to join our school"); it would be produced by girls for girls, girls like them, even themselves, as in, for their own pleasure – ultimately displacing the male gaze. A sort of queerly erotic space opens up:

> Affectivity occurs between bodies, between physiological arousal and the conscious realization of it by bodies. Affect is social in that it constitutes a contagious energy, an energy that can be whipped up or dampened in the course of interaction. (Wissinger, 2007, p. 232)

This moment – this affectivity – is (becoming) queer for what it does – the potentialities it produces, the releasing of sexuality and pleasure from the constructs that render them dangerous and risky and bind them to fixed identities. Different from another day's conversation about stereotypes of all girls schools:

> Mary: Apparently some guy was asking about [Artemis] cuz his daughter wants to know if it's an all girls school cuz she's homophobic.
>
> Anna: Ya, she wants to know if we're all going to hit on her. Isn't that a horrible accusation? I think that's horrid.
>
> Mary: Isn't that fucked?
>
> Anna: And like any all girls schools she thinks they're all lesbians? That's just a really fine example [of a stereotype] though [...] Maybe it's the dad who's more homophobic.

Mary: He's worried his daughter is going to turn into a lesbian if she comes here.

Anna: I've known parents [...] like if they know their daughter has been messing around with girls they don't want her to be more around girls.

This discussion centres homophobia and its prerequisite of fixed sexual orientations produced by the heterosexual matrix. It calls "dangerous" and "threatening" ("lesbian") sexualities into the room and in so doing reproduces the constraints of dominant heteronormativity. Girls' reactions to the idea that this is a lesbian school both actualize ("Isn't that a horrible accusation?") and counteractualize ("Maybe it's the dad who's more homophobic") homophobia. There is an element of making fun of parents' fears that their daughters might be "messing around with girls." Yet, there is still a striking difference in affect between this conversation and the synergistic, creative humour of our brainstorm session.

The play(fullness) emerging through the connection of bodies in our moment of satirical desiring production creates a line of flight that moves beyond the limitations of the "girl" subject – a becoming other – even while her herstory lingers in the room: "The body is produced through time, through becoming. There is, then, a history and politics of affect" (Colebrook, 2002, p. 61). The violent assemblage of forces (sexism, neoliberalism, capitalism, colonialism) that exercise control and capture over women's and girls' sexuality is displaced (if only tenuously/ intermittently) by an "affirmative politics" (Braidotti, 2009) that is, in this moment, "primarily creative and not critical, and it is critical precisely by being creative" (Nigianni & Storr, 2009, p. 1). Desire flows, expands through satire in unpredictable and unintentional ways, and yet satire also reads as performative. Butler (1993a) explicates performativity as the processes through which sexed and gendered categories are codified and rendered intelligible only through the

repetition of norms – the discursive iterability of limiting, naturalized (but not natural) performances that in turn produce the self and identity:

> And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint. (p. 95)

While the repetitions that constitute the constraining conditions for "girl" and/or "woman" subjects are still in process, this collective production of a satirical, hyperbolic dramatization of the sexualized girl subject in our conversation offers a critique that resembles drag performance:

> What is "performed" in drag is, of course, *the sign* of gender, a sign which is not the same as the body it figures, but which cannot be read without it. The sign, understood as a gender imperative, i.e. "girl!", reads less as an assignment than as a command and, as such, produces its own insubordinations. The hyperbolic conformity to the command can reveal the hyperbolic status of the norm itself, indeed, can become the cultural sign by which that cultural imperative might become legible. (Butler, 1993b, p. 26)

Here, satire, as a "queer assemblage" (Puar, 2005), is both representational/critical/constrained and affective/creative/productive. It is both deliberate resistance and the spontaneous, unanticipated flow of desire – simultaneously actualizing and counter-actualizing "girl."

*Becoming Other/Becoming Hero*

*As our conversation continues the energy surges between/through us producing a sort of heat in the room, like the friction of ideas and excitement rubbing together and releasing through this assemblage to produce a virtual film:*

> Laura: I have a great idea. First we won't say anything in this documentary. It'll start off really weird people won't really know what it is. So what we're going to do is we're going to show people in their little life journeys. It could show me working on my course work, reading my book you know, showing that I can name every bone in the body, making me seem you know like I'm a really well educated person doing this course. We could show Mary being so involved in this youth stuff, like that she went to this awesome youth conference. We could show Anna

going to work, living on her own...

Amy: And her artwork.

Laura: ya her artwork. And everybody. Bailey, doing photography stuff. And weren't you 14 years old when you first had your job?

Bailey: Thirteen.

Laura: Exactly, we could show you going to work and school every day. These CRAZY things.

Mary: [laughs] "These CRAZY things."

Laura: No I'm being serious. People would be like "Wow what is this."

Mary: A genius school? [laughter]

Laura: No we wouldn't even say it's a school. We wouldn't say anything. Obviously people who are there would sorta know. [...] No, it won't even talk about a school and then we could have a clip of this school with all these people that are doing AMAZING things with their lives that people wouldn't even expect us to do. And then coming to this school and people would be like "What the fuck?" Like you know?

Mary: Like "what the fuck is this place?" [laughs]

Amy: Ya like showing people doing their course work, your artwork, my business [coursework].

Laura: Showing them pictures of before - like at the end of the movie, "This was Laura before she went to Artemis."

Elicia: "You can tell from this photo that she was much different than she is now" [sarcasm, laughing].

Laura: No, well, you know what I mean [laughing]

Anna: Or you can show me. “Anna wants to go to college now” and then in the end credits show me pole dancing

Mary: Ya like Anna’s first day she told us she wanted to be a stripper

Anna: But now look at this bookworm [laughing].

Laura: Ya like [showing you] trying to pick your college stuff.

Anna: Or show me walking around Camosun [College].

Mary: Or show Laura working out and then reading a book “she also likes to break a mental sweat.”

[laughing]

Elicia: [laughing] That’s awesome.

Anna: It’s like the Bachelorette or something you know like...

Amy: We could show you know one of our outings that doesn’t go completely haywire, like I don’t know like us kayaking

Laura: Do you know what we could do also, is we could stage – oh, I’ve got so many [snaps fingers] good ideas [group laughing]...[adjusts in her chair] no I’m getting hot [fans herself].

[laughing]

Mary: I know. We’ll stage all these scenarios where we become heroes. And I’m not saying this just because I’ve been watching Heroes [laughs]. We could show like this old lady walking across the street. And she’s about to get hit by a car and then one of us runs out and saves her.

Laura: But we want realistic things right? [laughing]

Mary: What? We helped an old lady once [laughs].

Laura: Ya, but you're not just going to dive out in front of a car [laughing].

Anna: I would if it was an infant. If she's old no offence but I still have my whole life to live [laughing].

What allows this collective imagining to be so funny and full of possibilities – so different from many of our research sessions – is that it is unencumbered by the dominant constructions of "at-risk" girls. As such, this conversation pushes back against and moves beyond the limitations of naming and resisting structural inequities. This moment in our process seems to explicate for me what Rosi Braidotti (2009) means when she writes:

> the work of critique must not assume that the conditions for overturning negativity are necessarily available in the time or space. Moving beyond the dialectical scheme of thought means abandoning oppositional thinking. This means that oppositions are not tied to the present by negation and hence emerge out of a different set of premises, affects and conditions. (p. 45)

That is, this moment produces a different set of "premises, affects and conditions" for disrupting/ reconfiguring "at-risk girl" in our research process. Even as constructions of "risk" are absent from the discussion, girls reveal their deep awareness that it is impossible, within the frame of neoliberal intelligibility, for their audience to see them as anything other than "at-risk" – particularly if the film is about Artemis Place, which relies on the reproduction/reading of girls as "at-risk" in order to exist within neoliberal funding structures. However, rather than this closing off the potential of our film, this conversation creates openings.

Our conversation produces a line of flight through which girls engage in strategic manipulation of the audience's perception to make the impossible possible through the virtual film that comes to life. While Laura clarifies, "But we want realistic things, right?" she also wants to displace the intelligibility of the story: "We wouldn't even say it's a school. We wouldn't say anything [...] People would be like "what the fuck."" She wants to create a line of

flight for the audience through film, by decoupling the "crazy" and "amazing" things the girls are doing from the discursive bondage of the stereotypes explored in Chapter 4, so that girls' accomplishments can become "crazy" and "amazing" full stop – rather than crazy and amazing for those "at-risk" girls.[11] She is recognizing the ways film can, if used strategically, create a rupture in which "perception is liberated from the organizing structure of everyday life" (Colebrook, 2002, p. 31). Through our conversation girls collectively imagine how this desired displacement of the audience's perception would produce an affect of "what the fuck is this place," creating a deterritorialization, through which "defamiliarization enables imagination, even as it produces alienation" (Kaplan, 1987, p. 188). Girls' collective positioning as other is significant for the possibilities it enables: "The other is a threshold of transformative encounters. The 'difference' expressed by subjects who are especially positioned as 'other-than', that is to say as always already different from – has a potential for transformative or creative becoming" (Braidotti, 2009, p. 46). Multiple, different, indeterminable possibilities open up with the disruption of sequences and the destabilizing of the image(s) through which Artemis girls are typically rendered intelligible in the neoliberal organizing structure of everyday life.

While dominant narratives of successful neoliberal girlhood do make appearances through some of the chosen signifiers of success that emerge (e.g. "Anna wanted to be a stripper, now look at this bookworm", going to college, being fit and breaking a mental sweat, a reference to the Bachelorette), there are simultaneous ruptures that produce resistances to these same discourses. For instance, Bailey is valued for having her first job at age thirteen and Anna for going to work and living on her own, which girls had previously identified as things that are

[11] Notably, the latter sentiment was not uncommon when we presented our research in different settings and audience members would share their shock and awe at how "articulate" and "intelligent" the girls are, while engaging in a very limited way with the girls' critical knowledges.

more likely to be assessed in relation to "risk" than valued as life experiences and strengths. Merit is thus recoded to include the complex life experiences of girls typically excluded from such discourses. In the most humorous moments of this discussion, multiple becomings emerge: becoming-genius, becoming-hero, becoming-other. "The becoming is the something else, the newness that is created. Becoming is the movement through a unique event that produces experimentation and change. Becoming is a state of being in-between." (Jackson, 2010, p.581). The movement between the molar entities of "at-risk" and "hero", the becoming-hero, even in jest, produces resistance. In its molar form, hero hyperbolizes the neoliberal discourse of meritocracy. Mary's suggestion that girls become heroes simultaneously hyperbolizes and satirizes the construct of the good girl citizen and it contests the mutually constitutive hyperbolic discourses that position "at-risk" girls as "helpless victims" and/or position them as "antisocial" or girls who do not care about others. Anna offers a moment of twisted satire in which she, as hero, would save a baby but would not risk her young life for an old lady.

This virtual film produced through this conversation is incredibly powerful, particularly because there are few traces of it in the film we actually produced together. The lines of flight in the conversation are made possible because we are using the medium of film. Even though we are only *talking about* making a film, a different imaginary opens up through the collective project of making art. Our virtual film, as a thing (an inhuman body) in the assemblage, produced a different way of talking about girls' stories.

Once we were into the applied work of film production, things like logistics, time, and consideration of the audience, among other things, functioned in many ways to reterritorialize the images and sequences we produced. Part of the reason for this seems to emerge from the

tensions between the affective revolutionary imaginary produced through our brainstorm and its practical application for social action produced through PAR processes, which seemed to require us to be intelligible and recognizable to the dominant gaze (and to ourselves as embedded/ complicit in that gaze) while simultaneously trying to disrupt dominant perceptions:

> Bodies-in-becoming must be passing-persons capable of simulating the molar being assigned to them by the grid of political value judgement. This is a delicate operation, fraught with the danger that a group gaining representation in such apparatuses of capture as government and media will be trapped into operating entirely on their terms. (Massumi, 1999, p. 105)

So we render(ed) ourselves intelligible to our audience in order to affect social change and in so doing we stratify much of the creative and revolutionary potential that emerged in the moments of "ordinary affect" discussed in this chapter.

The audience – as bodies in the assemblage connecting with this would-be film – plays a critical role in sustaining and/or closing off the destabilizing potentialities of the counter-stories girls are producing in this conversation. Despite the flows of desire persisting to rupture the dominant gaze, these deterritorializations could (and likely would) become re-coded via the dominant discourses that structure the consumption of the "other". While this is a larger conversation that is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note, as we discussed in Chapter 2, that we had to consider together how girls' creative control is always mediated by the interpretation of their art by others. The critical knowledge we produced about the power and politics of representations through our collective analysis helped us shape the film that we produced.

At the same time, as I write in our collectively authored chapter (Loiselle, Taylor & Donald, forthcoming), girls did persist when I tried to close off some of the creative possibilities of our film:

> I remember Sarah, Ruthie and I were in my car driving to MediaNet. It was crunch time – a couple days before the premiere with lots of editing left to do. We were going over the priority order for the editing we'd be doing that day. I think it was Sarah who excitedly added, "and we're doing the blooper reel today too." I was wrought with anxiety at the amount of work we had to get done in such a short amount of time, so I said, "How about if we plan to do that once we've got a handle on the content of the film itself? I know you really want to have the bloopers in there, and if we don't get to it for the premiere we could still put that reel in after for future dissemination, no?" Ruth wasn't having it. She said, "No, I think it's really important for it to be in there for the screening. It helps show the audience more of who we are." Later at the first screening of the film, I could feel my heart expand witnessing laughter fill the theatre as the bloopers played on the screen. It was so cool. It really brought home for me how privileged I was to be part of those generative moments of levity that breathed a different kind of energy into our work. The girls were so right about the bloopers being a priority – that knowledge has stuck with me ever since and has pushed me to look at our process and our findings from different angles – to (re)think/(re)see/(re)experience our research through and as desire (Elicia in Loiselle, Taylor & Donald, forthcoming).

At the premiere screening, the bloopers reel of our film assembled with a different configuration of bodies in the theatre, amplifying the affective resonances of the satirical flows of desire – the generative, creative energy – produced in multiple moments throughout our process, like the moments I have explored in this chapter.

# Conclusions

Engaging deeply in this study alongside my co-researchers has been a transformational learning experience for me. It has challenged me to dig into the ongoing messiness and tensions of this work as a necessary and ethically coded practice of critical, collaborative research with girls. This thesis explores the moments and spaces in our research that enabled girls'/our embodied, affective, discursive knowledges and resistances to take flight in complex interplay with their/our complicity in and reproduction of dominant structural forces. I have analyzed the micro-political movements through which girls pushed back against structural inequities in multiple/deliberate/necessary/unintentional/unanticipated/humorous ways. I have explored (the importance of reading) these movements as flows of desire – creative and affective energies produced and amplified through the connections of (girls') bodies. The opportunity to read deeply for the molecular flows of desire in girls' stories and analyses has been a rare and profound privilege for me, providing new insights and useful questions I carry into my present/future practice. These include: How do (girls') bodies move/connect in ways that counteractualize molarity whether they/we/others understand it as resistance or not? Whether they/we/others can articulate it or not? Whether or not it is noticed or understood by others?
I argue that these desire-flows were important to notice and trace because of what they produced: multiple (if momentary) molecular ruptures and reconfigurations of the limitations of "girl" and "risk" as they are constituted through dominant neo-liberalism.

Through multiple iterations and cycles of collective and individual analysis, this work necessitated the use of multiple, overlapping theoretical perspectives that produced the hybridized feminist poststructuralist and desire-based framework I employed throughout this

thesis. I endeavoured to work across critical perspectives and frameworks in the areas of participatory research, social change, discourse analysis, and desire-based analysis. These frameworks still sit in tension with each other as I grapple with this question: How do the revolutionary possibilities of molecular flows of desire (which can be so momentary and so quickly re-coded) meet with the broader social change goals of PAR (which often serve to re-code desire to render change, and the people who demand it, intelligible within a dominant neoliberal frame)? As I have noted, the very molar categorization of "girl" presupposes the interpretation of reconfiguring desire-flows through reductive and constraining neoliberal discourses. So, how then do those of us working in complex (research/action) assemblages alongside girls align ourselves with these micro-movements to help sustain the lines of flight they produce – to contribute our energies to holding open spaces where alternative configurations of "girl" are in process, are becoming? This demands conceptualizing and enacting praxis as an emergent process – not as the application of (fixed/pure/static) theory onto practice/people, but rather as collaborative, generative and radical work that is trans-disciplinary, trans-theoretical, and committed to engaging with the inevitable tensions and complexities of doing activism that is embedded in multiple (structural) forces and often within institutionalized spaces (such as education systems). From here then, how can we better understand and enact critical praxis as necessarily simultaneously productive, creative, generative, affective, embodied, discursive...? For me, this involves what Wissinger (2007) describes as

> ...an understanding of the body as continuous with its environment, rather than a discrete entity with a fixed essence or an organism contained and bound by the skin...as thoroughly social yet stubbornly material...where agency arises not only from subjectivity but from other forms of energy, coursing below the level of conscious subject identity. These forces move bodies and constitute bodies in this movement. (p. 231)

I see critical PAR as an important site for this work of continually extending and reconfiguring understandings of resistance and agency in and through social justice work. For instance, because our critical, girl-centred approach to PAR deliberately and politically positioned girls as producers of (critical) knowledge, our methodology was in many ways invested in generating enabling conditions for ruptures, lines of flight, "release points" (McClelland & Fine, 2008b), even as our process was embedded within structural forces that continually stratify desire. I am certain that it is not just our coming together, but our coming together in deeply complex ways through PAR that produced the affects, intensities, and reconfigurations in/through our research. At the same time, I have grappled in this thesis with the tensions between the structuring of social action through PAR and the affective/molecular movements that, even though they worked to reconfigure molar discourses throughout our process, remained largely unseen in our social action. I am still engaging the question of how to sustain the revolutionary imaginary of molecular desire-flows, such as those that emerged in our process, through the work of social change. As I ponder this I have a feeling I will be going back to Tuck (2010) to connect again with desire as a force that accumulates wisdom, as a way of understanding how the reconfigurations produced through our process have travelled, resonated, amplified, picked up texture in unanticipated ways – whether or not through our (arguably static) research products.

With my analysis in this thesis, it is my intention to contribute nuanced perspectives about "at-risk" girlhoods and engaging in desire-based, critical praxis with girls to critical girlhood studies, feminist studies, critical PAR practice, Child and Youth Care, as well as more generally to diverse sites of social justice praxis with girls. Across all of these fields and disciplines, I hope that this thesis articulates the importance of better understanding, learning

from, and engaging with the ways girls negotiate and reconfigure discourses of "girl" and "risk." In my experience, such ruptures revealed and demanded me to notice my own complicity in, reproduction of, and resistances to dominant structural forces in the multiple moments of theorizing, writing about, and working with girls to affect change.

The goal of this thesis was not to provide definitive conclusions or solutions, but rather to show a way through the sometimes conflicting or contradictory theoretical perspectives that I worked across in order to be responsive to the girls and what emerged in our research. I want to affirm the value of struggling through these tensions both alongside the girls and in my own process of analysis. It is has been a deeply creative and generative, if also anxiety-making, struggle. As I move away from this project, its resonances are continually becoming in my practice, through my body and the assemblages it forms. I have been re-shaped multiple times over through this process and I am infinitely grateful for all of the connections that have led me to these words, even as the ideas they are forming are necessarily always still in process.

# Epilogue

Question 4: *Why me?*

Through this process
I cycle back to myself
And my girlhood becomes entwined with theirs
With ours
I am there
*and* I am here
and how I cross the space and time in between
is marked on
this body which travels
this path
And so I feel an unrelenting clawing in my gut
reminding me how I got here
to this place
Where serendipity
is a privilege that takes me outside these stale walls
Where multiple ideas and realities (e)merge
unauthored and unauthorized
Where the boundary between I and Them
goes in and out of focus
and
We
becomes a tool
for change

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Appendix A

***Participant Consent Form***

**Project Title: Artemis Place Youth Participatory Evaluation (YPE) Project 2008/09**

**Researcher(s):** Elicia Loiselle, Graduate Student, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria

**Supervisor:** Dr. Sandrina de Finney, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria

You are being invited to participate in a youth-led, participatory evaluation of Artemis Place. You are being asked to participate because you're an Artemis girl and have a unique perspective on how going to Artemis Place affects your life. I will be facilitating this participatory evaluation and writing about it in my thesis for the research requirement of my Master of Arts degree in Child and Youth Care. I will also be writing an evaluation report for Artemis Place, based partly on this project.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Because I work with you in other ways in my role as a practicum student at Artemis Place, I want to be sure you know that your choice to participate or not to participate will not affect how I or Artemis Place staff treat you. So that you don't feel pressured, I will not ask you directly whether you are going to participate in this project. If you do want to participate you can just hand this signed consent form in to me before or at the first participatory evaluation session on _____ from 12:30 - 2:30pm in the Life Skills Room.

So that you can make an informed choice, this form explains what would be involved if you decide to be part of this project. Please ask me any questions you may have about the research to be sure you understand what it's all about.

**What's it for? Why is it important?**

The purpose of this project is to provide an opportunity for you to work in a team with other Artemis girls to do your own evaluation of Artemis Place, using creative methods like photography and engaging in group discussions and interactive group activities. This way you get to: a) decide as a group what you think is important to understand about your experiences at Artemis Place, b) work with each other to better understand each other's experiences, and c) work together to create a final product that might include recommendations and/or actions for changes that will strengthen Artemis Place and the wider community.

This project is important because you should have a say in decisions about services that directly affect your life. It's also important because it's rare for girls who face the kind of

barriers and social exclusion you've experienced to have their voices heard by their communities. Participating in this project will give you the opportunity to tell your stories and share your perspectives and ideas with people who make decisions that affect you. The community will benefit from your expertise and unique perspectives and can use what you say to improve how it supports girls who've gone through experiences similar to yours. Through this project, you will also learn many different skills, including: photography, communication, critical analysis and community building.

**What's going to happen?**

The focus of the evaluation and what happens in the project will be mostly up to the group, but there is a basic structure. The project will consist of 8 weekly group sessions held on Wednesday afternoons between February 6 and March 26, 2009, from 12:30pm to 2:30pm in the Life Skills Room at Artemis Place. If you do choose to participate, it's important for you to come to all 8 weekly sessions if possible, since we'll be working as a team over the 8 weeks of the project and building on our work from one week to the next. The group sessions will involve community building, interactive group discussions and creative activities (e.g. photography).

Sessions will be audio recorded and transcribed so that I can refer to your exact words when I'm writing my thesis and when the evaluation report is written. The group may also want to refer back to the recordings or transcripts during the project. I will also be taking notes at all the sessions.

As part of the project, you will be asked to spend up to 2 hours of your time outside of the group sessions each week to document some of your personal experiences through creative methods like photography. To compensate you for any inconvenience your participation may cause, you will receive an honorarium of $5.00 per week for every group session that you attend. This honorarium will be given out at the end of each of the 8 sessions. If you don't attend a session, you will not receive an honorarium that week. Please note that it is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to participants. If you would not participate if the honorarium was not offered, then you should decline.

**Are there any risks?**

It is possible that the group will talk about some difficult issues. The group will create discussion guidelines together so that everyone can feel as safe as possible participating in the group process. If any topic or question makes you uncomfortable, you don't have to talk about it in the group. It's possible that some participants may say things during group sessions that are upsetting for you. So, if you do feel uncomfortable or unsafe at any time and feel you need one-on-one support to work through what you're feeling, you are encouraged to step out of the group to talk with your counselor. I also invite you to talk to me about any difficult emotions you are experiencing and/or any concerns you have about the project. I can also help you schedule follow up sessions with your counselor or other support people outside of the group session times.

**What if I change my mind?**

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you will not be penalized or treated differently if you choose to end your participation in the project. If you decide to withdraw from the project, you will have the choice about whether or not I and/or the group can still use your contributions, such as recordings/transcripts of your comments during group discussions and photos you took. You can choose to allow all, parts, or none of your contributions to be used. If there are contributions you don't want used for the study, they will be edited out of transcripts, or, in the case of photos, will be returned to you. However, if any of your contributions are linked to group contributions (e.g. you helped create a map of themes from the photographs or something you said sparked a group discussion on a topic), your contributions will be used in summarized form with no direct quotes or identifying information so that the group contribution is not lost.

**What if I have questions later on about what I 'm consenting to?**

Each time we meet for a project group session, there will be time set aside to discuss how the project is going. You can ask questions and/or raise concerns at any time during the process. You can change your mind at any time about giving consent for some or all of your contributions to be used in the research project. For example, if a participant says something one week that she doesn't want used in the research, she can ask to have that comment edited out of the transcript. You will be in control of which of your contributions are used and how until materials have been made public (e.g. in the evaluation report, my thesis, or elsewhere.) Once my thesis is approved by a committee at the University of Victoria, it will be made public and will be available in the UVic library.

**Will I be anonymous?**

You won't be completely anonymous because I and others in the group will know what contributions you made to the group. It's expected that participants won't share anything that happens in the group with people outside the group. However, I cannot guarantee that all group members will keep everything confidential.

You will be anonymous in any materials that are made available to those outside the group (e.g. the evaluation report, my thesis, and other materials the group decides to create.) You can choose or will be given a pseudonym and any identifying information will be removed from your comments. The only identifying information that will be made public is that the participants in the project all attended Artemis Place during the 2008/09 school year.

However, you may choose to waive your confidentiality in the dissemination of the evaluation results if: you want to include a photo or photos that reveal your identity, you want to be credited by name in the evaluation report, and/or you want your name to be associated with any of your comments. Keep in mind that even if you don't appear in any photos, you could still be identified as a participant if there are photos of any objects or places that people might be able to associate with you (e.g. your favourite bag, your shoes, your room etc.)

The audio recordings of group sessions, flip chart notes, my notes, any photos that are submitted and any other information that comes from the project will be locked in a filing cabinet that only I have access to, and/or saved and password protected on my computer.

There is a limitation to participants' confidentiality, because I have a legal duty to report to a Ministry of Child and Family Development office if a participant says something that gives me reason to believe that a child or minor has been or is likely to be abused or neglected or that the participant is planning on causing serious harm to herself or someone else.

**How will the research be used?**

This research will be used for an evaluation report and my thesis. You can decide which of your photos can be used for the evaluation report and my thesis. Original copies of photos and any negatives are your property and will be returned to you. The group may also decide on other ways to share their work with the public. I and/or interested group members may choose to write articles for academic and/or other kinds of publications. There may be opportunities for me and/or interested participants to present this project to the community or at conferences and workshops.

**Questions or Concerns:**

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1;
- Contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria, (250) 472-4545 ethics@uvic.ca

**Visually Recorded Images/Data**:

- Photos may be taken of me for (initial those options you consent to):
    - Documentation (as part of data collection during the study) _____
    - Dissemination* _____
        - This may include Artemis Place program evaluation report(s), Elicia Loiselle's MA thesis, community and other public presentations, other materials/publications about this project
- Photos taken by me may be used for (initial those options you consent to):
    - Documentation (as part of data collection during the study) _____
    - Dissemination* _____

- This may include Artemis Place program evaluation report(s), Elicia Loiselle's MA thesis, community and other public presentations, other materials/publications about this project

*Even if no names are used, you may be recognizable if visual images are shown as part of the results.

**Waiving Confidentiality:**

I agree to be identified by name / credited in the results of the project. _____

I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results. _____

**Consent** :

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

| *Name of Participant* | *Signature* | *Date* |
|---|---|---|

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***