Child and Youth Care Practitioners Meaning Making of Feminist Identities

By

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Abstract

The author began her inquiry asking: where are the feminists in Child and Youth Care (CYC)? With the expertise of three self- identified feminist CYC practitioners, she explores their meaning making of feminist identities. Employing post structural and social constructivist lenses, punctuated by poetry, she and her consultants explore a wide range of feminist discourse including the performance, resistance and evolution of feminism, personally and professionally.

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For every scholar who is a poet at heart.

Table of Contents

Chapter One

Introduction

To you
I can risk words about this
(Birney, 1973, p.193)

When I first began conceptualizing this inquiry, I was in a state of transition between graduating from an undergraduate degree in Child and Youth Care (CYC) and entering graduate studies in the same discipline. I entered my graduate studies program carrying an intense dissonance that I had not fully articulated. It was through the conceptualization and execution of this thesis that I came to understand what this dissonance constituted, how I moved through it, and how this was done in speaking to other child and youth care practitioners who identified as feminists. This chapter intends to inform the reader of my focus, and draw attention to the intention of my inquiry.

The Concept of Dissonance

Hawkins and Allen (1991) describes dissonance as "harsh-toned; unharmonious…incongruous, clashing" (p.416). This is also a term that is taken up in musical discourse and appropriately captures how I interpreted my rhythm in my undergraduate program. I felt "out of synch" with my colleagues and specifically, the curriculum presented. I began to ask myself: Are the others like myself who feel themselves somehow on the periphery of child and youth care? Are there others who experience the dissonance of a curriculum that, even if we could not name it as such, felt too neutral, too uncritical? Are there others who were grasping the social, political and gendered realities of children, youth and families, and failed to see this reality adequately addressed in their development as practitioners? And, finally, the question that led me to

graduate school: where were the other feminists and how were they living their lives as practitioners?

It is important to note that I had traversed three disciplines at this point. I began university a few years after passionately declaring I would never attend. I began as an English major with the hopes of entering the education program to become a high school teacher. I then moved to Women's Studies to sate my thirst for explicit feminist material. Although I learned much from these two disciplines, I also learned what their common deficit was – learning to use the materials presented, such as literature, poetry and feminism, in a manner that would allow for contact with youth. The Child and Youth Care program presented me the opportunity to hone my counseling skills that were specific to children, youth and families, and I truly wanted to find an academic "home" to hang my hat. My experience in the School of Child and Youth Care, however, was also a frustrating home to fit all my previously acquired furniture into. Each concept, example or teaching aid was filtered through my lens that was simultaneously critical, gendered and genuinely skeptical regarding the efficiency of changing the world for child, youth and families with "traditional" or "proven" theories. Since past experience is one of lack of positive representation regarding feminism, my present inquiry is one that brings forth many of the positive accounts of my consultants[1]. This is not to say that I do not speak to some of the tensions inherent in moving through the world as a feminist, rather; I wish to illuminate the potentialities that can emerge through my consultants' narratives.

[1] The three individuals represented in this thesis are referred to as "consultants" as opposed to participants. This is because I consider them to hold expertise specific to CYC feminist practice.

The Self / Our Selves

Central to a discussion focused on identity is to explicate my interpretation of "self". Hoskins (1997) states:

> We concluded that it is essential for helping professionals to take the time to explicate their own theories of self prior to working with others. The same can be said of researchers. Prior to researching the self, it is important to explicate the assumptions pertaining to the self and how, in turn, such assumptions may shape and influence the research methodology. (p.68)

My conceptualization of the self has evolved parallel to dialogues I have engaged in, research projects I have worked on[2], and educational materials I have interacted with. For example, when I was an undergraduate student, the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria still taught the model of "Knowledge, Skills and Self" (KSS) as the predominant self-awareness model. This triangle of identity was thought to develop a heightened consciousness of how these three domains contributed to professional practice. I use the term "domain" intentionally, as they were conceptualized as separate but concurrently active. Despite feeling like I had multiple *identities*, I also felt that these were superimposed on a singular, essential *self*. Identity, to me, was a verbal descriptor of a self and these verbal descriptors changed based on context. For example, it was important for me to announce myself as feminist in Child and Youth Care classrooms to differentiate my lens from the dominant discourse. Likewise, I would present a Queer identity in situations or conversations where I felt such an identity to be invisible. These were both clumsy attempts to bring forth "parts" of my "self" but I

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[2] Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Marie Hoskins for the opportunity to work on the Listening to Girls' Interpretations of Anorexia (LIGIA) Project for the past three years exploring adolescent girls' identity and meaning making in the context of eating disorders.

limited myself to language as opposed to synthesizing language with action. As I moved through more in-depth learning of post modern counselling theories and related literature, specifically social constructionism, multiple and potential selves emerged. The Gergens (2004), for example, ask: "It is one thing to generate attractive ideas; the important question is whether there is a productive relationship between the words and our ways of life?" (p. 47). I began to question how my "identities" as previously articulated, were, indeed, attractive ideas as opposed to ways of life, of being? This brings me to the next section, which explicates the term feminism as it is used in this study.

Feminism

Like Lather (1991), I concur that "while the varied strands of feminism can be categorized in many ways, all feminisms appeal to the powers of agency and subjectivity as necessary components of socially transformative struggle" (p.28). Flora Clarke McLaren (1989) offers a more poetic description of subjectivity that appeals to my own growth as a feminist: "*There were things she remembered as she grew, / Clear bright bits of patter of the things she knew"* (p. 47). The reader should not be lulled into a sense of false simplicity by these previous statements, however, as it is these daily "bright bits" of a socially constructed pattern that remind me that we still live in an unjust world. Feminism, for me, is the raw embodiment of being female in this world, of experiencing, recognizing and resisting sexism. Feminism transcends gender, however, and remains impotent without acknowledging the intersections of race, class, sexual/gender orientation and ability. This means that my way of moving in the world, for example, is also informed by being a Queer woman. As I moved through this inquiry, what I knew in theory became what I knew from just being. Queer, woman, and feminist were no longer

separate identity qualifiers, but concurrent embodiments of my multiple selves. In the words of hooks (2000):

> An important stage in the development of political consciousness is reached when individuals recognize the need to struggle against all forms of oppression. The fight against sexist oppression is of grave political significance – it is not for women only. Feminist movement is vital to both in its power to liberate us from the terrible bonds of sexist oppression and in its potential to radicalize and renew other liberation struggles. (p.42)

As such, my conceptualization of feminist identity transcends the currently espoused gender binary. When I teach feminist theory to undergraduate students, for example, there appears to be the temptation to reduce the theoretical implications to arguing about whether feminism is about women or men. The energy expended in this argument further entrenches the gender binary and I see it as my pedagogical imperative to facilitate conversations of how feminist theory might be useful in exploring other intersections of structural oppression, such as race, class[3], and sexual/ gender orientation. Those who may question what the contemporary relevance of feminism is also challenge this pedagogical process. Faludi (1991) speaks to this hurdle:

> Feminism is 'so 70's,' the pop culture's ironists say, stifling a yawn. We're 'postfeminist' now, they assert, meaning not that women have arrived at equal justice and moved beyond it, but simply that they themselves are beyond even pretending to care. It is an affectlessness that may, finally, deal the most

[3] I understand that there has been a shift in language and "class" is usually replaced by Socio-economic status. In conversations with individuals from self- identified working class roots and currently working class, I have intentionally chosen to use the word class out of respect for them.

devastating blow to American [and I would argue, Canadian] women's rights. (p.72)

I must confess that although my conceptualization of identity evolved and expanded, my conceptualization of feminism would shrink, then bloom, then shrink once more as I wrestled with it. For example, I sunk into an intense period of questioning if feminism had been subsumed under other ways of being, such as the radical child and youth care workshop I attended at the 7th International Child and Youth care conference, facilitated by Keith Moen. I began to falter in my logic when esteemed women in my life balked when I asked them if they were feminists, despite embodying what I perceived to be feminist being such as respect for diversity, social awareness and action, critical thinking, and resistance[4] on varying levels. And because I see feminism as so integral to my thinking and action in the world, those who questioned the relevancy of feminism seemed to be questioning the relevancy of *me.*

Furthermore, the process of this inquiry has problematized my feminist identity as a whole, and this has been fruitful. Ricks and Garfat (1992) declared: "there will never be a *[sic]* feminist perspective in the field of child and youth care until we are individually clear about what feminism means to us, and how that can be transformed into daily encounters of a transformational kind" (p.85). While I appreciate the call to be intentional about my feminist self / selves, their comments also lack the relational aspect[5] that I sought. The Gergens (2004), for example, state: "let us not focus on the meaning within the head, but the way meaning is created in relationship. We move from the

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[4] I see resistance as encapsulating many modes of being, including but not exhaustive of, challenging gender roles or gender itself, counselling practices, pedagogical implications, direct action, advocacy, community work, and other areas of challenging the patriarchal and heterosexist status quo.

[5] By relational, I wish to be clear that I am not subscribing to essentialist notions of the gendered female, but reflecting a collective orientation.

within to the between" (p. 32). Although this inquiry is looking how child and youth care practitioners make meaning of a feminist identity, I must also be explicit in saying that my own conceptualization of feminism transformed through my relationship with my consultants. Despite the assertion that I, as an individual, had to be clear regarding what feminism meant or looked like to me, this clarity only emerged through dialogue. I have moved from believing that feminist was something you called yourself to a philosophy you enact. As such, many comments that my consultants shared focus not only on the meaning they make from identifying as feminist child and youth care practitioners, but how that identity plays out in various contexts.

The Research Question

Many questions led up to the formulation of the research question that informs this inquiry. Do some child and youth care practitioners identify as feminist, and exclude the explicit label in written accounts of their work? For example, I have written articles for publication (Little, 2001a; 2001b; 2004a; 2004b; 2005) but were these articles explicitly feminist? Or do they articulate a feminist consciousness that guides their aims and ambitions? If we are now at the tail end of a "third" wave of feminism, do practitioners assume equality, thus rendering a feminist identity redundant?[6] Does this redundancy depend on marginalizing factors such as age, sexual/gender orientation, disability, or race? Does a "feminist agenda" become less and less important to those with a constellation of privilege? Do younger women, men and transgendered individuals view the social and political issues embedded in feminism differently than those who experienced the second wave, or like myself, who felt the residual effects? Or,

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[6] For further discussion of third wave feminism, please see Brown, 1992; Drake, 1997; and Manji, 1995. Suffice to say, we may be into the fourth wave by the time I finish this thesis.

are we still experiencing a backlash that silences feminism in child and youth care? Furthermore, how do I distinguish between those who hold onto an arbitrary label without reflection and those who live as feminists? What does that even look like? Clearly, questions bred more queries, many of them outside the scope of this thesis, but they provided the foundation for conceptualizing what it was I was inquiring into, and this is discussed in more detail below.

I am indebted to Rose and Innes (1992) for the preliminary investigation they undertook and the questions they generated regarding the experiences of women in child and youth care, and have built on their inquiry. Specifically, I conducted in-depth interviews with child and youth care practitioners who currently, or have, used the term "feminist" to describe their personal or professional selves. Jackson (2000) has also inspired this inquiry:

> My work has developed out of my commitment to feminism, which I see as a central part of identity, both personally and politically. Feminist research is about praxis, about affecting social change. (p.190)

For the purposes of this inquiry, individuals who hold the identity qualifier are especially of interest because they have *acquired* or *sustained* this self-identification when "between the structural constraints and the interpersonal and personal complexity and contradictions, it is not easy to practice one's beliefs" (Walker, Kees Martin, & Thompson, 1988, p. 21). Practicing one's beliefs as a feminist practitioner, then, is also complex and constrained. A feminist consciousness, however, lends to a critical understanding of our self, our selves. This in turn, could potentially lead to a more critical understanding of the social and political contexts in which our clients and our

work are embedded within. A strong undercurrent to this inquiry is also my need to bridge my sense of isolation I feel as a feminist practitioner and create the opportunity to speak to others who saw feminism, however they defined it, as salient to themselves and their practice. Hence, I set forth with an overarching research question guiding my inquiry: *how do child and youth care practitioners make meaning of their feminist identity*? Given the sparse literature regarding feminism in the child and youth care canon, the current sociopolitical situation in British Columbia affecting children, youth and families in a negative, even tragic manner, and my own investment in feminism, I am confident the reader will agree that this research question is timely. I also hope the reader is genuinely curious to how feminism is described, storied, and enacted by my three consultants, Newman, Teya and Penelope[7].

Overview of the Thesis

Now that the reader has been introduced to the research question, a cursory overview of the thesis itself is warranted. I will begin by explicitly situating myself as the researcher and reflexively detail some of the challenges and hope that emerged through this process. I will then walk the reader through the literature review, specifically, feminist literature as it relates to child and youth care, but also literature searches in other disciplines, including nursing, social work, and family counselling. These areas were explored with the dual intention of illuminating how other helping professionals spoke of feminism and having a broader understanding of the potential their canons held in terms of challenges and successes of feminist discourse. It also made sense to search what I call the "sister" professions due to the increase in multidisciplinary practice. With the reflexive piece followed by situating the literature, my aim is that the reader will have a

[7] Consultants chose their own pseudonyms, based on irony, myth and childhood memories, respectively.

rough overview of the map. I then move to methodology and explore the underlying philosophies of this thesis – feminist post structuralism, social constructionism and poetry. Given these are the major theoretical strains within this work I pay close attention to language, gender and the construction of feminist consciousness and how that plays out. For myself, I offer the reader a series of poems that demonstrate one aspect of how I enact my feminism, deal with dissonance and play with language. Since identity is a social construction, largely constructed through language, I also walk the reader through how all four of us (my consultants and myself) came to feminism. It is also relevant to devote a chapter to gender, since gender is important for ideas of social construction as well as feminism. As it has been pointed out by a variety of readers, this thesis strikes an ironic chord with gender, as it is my male-identified consultant who is most oft cited. This chapter will explore some of my own transformative learning in relation to male participation in feminist struggle. We then move to how feminism is performed in the lives of my consultants and then to how feminism, as a way of being or thinking, is resisted. Finally, we move to the evolution of feminism in the closing chapter and explore what might be on the horizon for feminisms.

Chapter Two

Situating the Researcher, or

A wild patience has taken me this far
(Rich, 1981, p.8)

Half way through this inquiry, I was ready to hang my feminist hat in the closet, shut the door and walk away. I had been warned by professors and committee members that writing a thesis is a dialectical process, but I am certain they did not mean the vacillation between hope and despair that were the competing signposts on this journey. Adrienne Rich (1981) referred to this dichotomy as "anger and tenderness: my selves" (p. 9). Negotiating multiple selves in a single research endeavor, however, is fraught with detours. In fact, I wrote:

I'm supposed to be writing research,
but,
musing interrupts
(my thesis is not a-mused).
Maybe I should try one long poem
exempt from punctuation.
Theory dilutes my rage,
methodology erases my grief-
it is so much more than this.
You said:
"Words shrink things that seemed limitless
When they were in you head to no more
than living size when they're brought out"
and I agree,
I carry that quote with me.
I often read it tucked
between pages of feminist epistemology-
my newly ingested academic astrology.
I've laid out
my entombed body for committee,
but they've plucked the bones clean.
There is nothing left for me,
except words re-arranged on a page.

So much for originality,
I'll return to poetry.

The despair felt in this process was three fold. As the poem points out above, I dwelled in a mental space that dictated the maxim "it's all been done before" and that seemed to be exemplified by my physical office space that is scattered with books on feminist theories, radical works of fiction and countless collections of poetry. Doubtful questions began to emerge: Who was I to think that I could contribute to the ever growing and critical canon of feminist writers? Was I resorting to a topic that simply felt "safe" for me? Was this thesis somehow an arranged marriage between child and youth care and feminism, and would the two parties even be compatible, and could the partnership even last beyond the last page of theorizing? As O'Connor (2001) reflects: "the failure to articulate explicitly the worldview most influencing the research process, compounded by the evolving qualitative research context, can create confusion, self-doubt, and frustration for new qualitative social work researchers" (p.139). This is not intended to support a "woe is me" perspective, rather, her words echoed in my attempt to grasp onto something solid as the next two folds of despair began to shroud my clarity.

The second challenge was the continued media coverage of the Pickton Farm investigation[8]. The night that the news broke, that there were indeed, human remains in the final meat products the farm produced, I was eating dinner with my family. I recall the bile rising in my throat, but the tears welling in my system constricted it. Here I had been sipping tea or wine pondering the emancipatory potential of feminism in the lives of both practitioners and the youth with whom they worked, and 60 women were missing from the down town eastside of Vancouver, notorious for its poverty and addiction. That,

[8] At the time of writing the final draft, Willy Pickton had been charged with several murders of missing sex trade workers.

I thought, was true despair. It remains an eerie coincidence that my first public coming out as a feminist followed the Montreal Massacre in 1989 and now I found myself writing a thesis devoted to feminist identity in the wake of the gruesome discovery of women's remains at a pig farm. At the time, this event did not spark courage on my part to continue with the struggle for equality for women, but rather felt like a failure since De Koninck and Lamoureux (1991) had written:

> The young women murdered at the Polytechnique were refused the right to exist. They didn't give their lives, their lives were taken from them: there was, therefore, a crime against humanity. Yet to us has fallen the task of explaining what is self-evident in this tragedy: the rejection of the underlying logic in the killer's demented act. We must work toward bringing about a society in which women have the right to exist, without creating supplementary victims. Our determination to change this still-misogynist society has been reinforced, and we will apply ourselves even more, in order that such an event never takes place again. (p. 118)

Yet, here it was, it *had* happened again, right across the strait, with fear from family members that someone they knew, long missing, might turn up as DNA. I began to have an oppositional conversation with myself: what is the point? Can you become anymore isolated in your books while women are kidnapped, killed, disposed of like livestock? I felt sick with privilege and I also felt paralyzed with inaction, which leads to the third challenging component, my consultants.

The third fold of despair occurred when talking to my consultants. Throughout the course of the interviews, they detailed activities, initiatives and projects they were or

had been involved in. These ranged from clinical interactions to public protests. Newman, for example, recalled a protest he attended with his youth group:

> *Privileged people have the hardest time seeing their privilege, right? They believe everyone has the opportunity, the script is so current right now, right? Gordon Campbell is horrible for it. We did this one action, the youth group that I work with they totally made this scenario, they voted me to be Gordon Campbell, so I had to wear this gray thing on my head and one of them said "you should be blindfolded. So, I just had this nylon and another one said: "he needs to have the word privilege written on there" so I was running around with this nylon over my eyes with the word privilege and it was such a powerful metaphor for that dynamic.*

When had I become an "academic" feminist as opposed to a "real" feminist out there on the military metaphor of front lines? I struggled with being able to identify activism without resorting to binary thinking once again. Despite university campuses being a hotbed of political activity, I had slowly disengaged myself from various activities with feminist aims: leaving Women's Studies as a major, no longer volunteering with the campus Women's Centre and general apathy has grown regarding spearheading or joining committees. In some respects, I felt as though I had grown into a feminist in name only, not action. I was assuming that action equaled public, and that activism equaled some sort of dramatic event. In fact, I wrote:

There's noise in my head
that simply does not abate/
great debate
about how my activism
has softened/apathy blossomed
I used to have a hard on
for the revolution,
now I am flaccid

At the same time, other opportunities became available via avenues of research and teaching, and I asked myself, are these not also feminist aims? Looking for clarity, I went back to hooks (2000), who states:

> Another reason education has not been of primary concern to feminist activists is the tug-of-war that has existed within feminist movement *[sic]* between feminist intellectuals and academics, and participants in the movement who equate education with bourgeois privilege and are fiercely anti-intellectual. This tug-of-war has led to the formation of a false dichotomy between theory (the development of ideas) and practice (the actions of the movement), with one group privileging 'practice'. As a consequence, there is often little congruity between feminist theory and practice. This intensifies the feelings of some women engaged in activism…that they are superior to or more 'politically correct' that women who concentrate their energies on developing ideas. (p. 113)

This comment illuminates the entrenched view that theory is one thing, and practice is another, and that ultimately, none of the aims of feminism can be served if such internal division separates the collective thrust for change, whether "inside" the system or "out". Despite hooks' wisdom, I was still on the edge of considering my consultants more radical, more real, more feminist than I, due to their community practice, until Newman reflected:

> *I'm there with them, that pain and that frustration and that fear of homelessness and poverty is just like fuck, you're angry too cause it doesn't have to be that way. So, that's where I sorta spiral around and I don't feel like I'm really doing the work I could be really good at it. But that's not true, I feel like I am good at it, but it just has such a cost for me right now, huge cost, and I feel like it costs my family too, cause I come home and I'm pooped, I'm spent, right? So, you know, its not being integral to my beliefs at all. Not in the least.*

Here, we shared the same goal of leading integral lives as both feminists and child and youth care workers, yet both found ourselves questioning our respective paths. My envy of my consultants was fuelled largely in part by a romantic vision of what they were doing that seemed somehow greater than writing papers and going to conferences. When this consultant shared his concern, I was once again grounded in the urgent need for collective support of feminist endeavors – whether in the red zone of Victoria, the downtown eastside of Vancouver or on campuses. This then leads us to how I regained a sense of hope and purpose for this inquiry.

Friere (2003) declared:

> Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness can become tragic despair. Hence the need for a kind of education in hope. Hope, as it happens, is so important for our existence, individual and social, that we must take every care not to experience it in a mistaken form, and thereby allow it to slip toward hopelessness and despair. Hopelessness and despair are both the consequences and the cause of inaction or immobilism. (p. 9)

Clearly, I was bordering on inaction brought about by such hopelessness. There are three folds of hope that emerged in time to sustain this inquiry to the form and text you now hold in your hands. The first was the birth of my niece, Maeve Lyla Little. No, I did not nurture this child for 9 months in my own womb, I did not endure a distressed baby in labour and need an emergency C-section to ensure life; I did not endure sleepless nights and endless feedings. In fact, I did not get to hold her until she was 3.5 months old. I

have worked with children and youth and their families in a variety of capacities, and many have touched my heart. The arrival of Maeve signaled a new urgency to further social justice and feminist work so that she can enjoy a future world where she is not discriminated against because of her gender, her sexuality, her socio-economic status or her future choices as a woman (or of her very choice of gender). Furthermore, I feel responsible as an Auntie to role model a resistance to injustice. Role modeling is not appearance; it is enactment. For example, Penelope commented: *"I'm not somebody different when I'm with kids, so it's not an act, you know"*. She further explicated that children and youth are often the first to notice lack of integrity in adults and are more willing to react to when they see more theorizing than practice:

> *And sometimes they react, kids much more so than adults because we are taught to be more polite, when they feel like you're droning on or imposing something on them, they let you know.*

I have already "imposed" on Maeve by sending her what I consider pro-feminist books (Cole, 1997; Munsch, 1980) but am also aware that the array of feminist books decorating my home does not eradicate the inequality I face each day for various reasons. And yet, childhood books did have a positive impact on my development of my social conscience. To plant a seed of consciousness, then, becomes my role as West Coast Auntie.

The second fold of hopefulness has come forward in terms of creative dissemination of research, writing and dialogue. The very act of writing a thesis felt very constraining- as much as I tried to creatively disseminate my writing, it was always reigned in via structured means with the occasional burst of poetry. Tierny (2002) suggests "that qualitative researchers broaden the narrative strategies that we employ so

that our texts are built more in relation to fiction and storytelling, rather than in response to the norms of science and logical empiricism"(p.386). My own experience with creative and collective means of anti-oppressive work has occurred within the Mayhem Collective[9]. This is important for two reasons. First, participation in the Mayhem Collective has provided a means of articulating child and youth care philosophy outside of traditional means of dissemination such as thesis and conferences. In fact, although the Mayhem Collective has worked within the academic realm, it has done its best work in using multi-media, grass roots approaches such as web sites, zines and performance. It has been through my participation that ideas such as direct action, parody and poetry have been enthusiastically embraced. It is a child and youth care space that I feel I can be myself, or all of my selves. As previously discussed and problematized, the "self" is embraced in child and youth care curriculum and practice and I do not mean to diminish this important aspect. My work with the Mayhem Collective, however, has provided a conduit for the selves that are too feminist, too critical, too queer, and too radical for conventional avenues of child and youth care. This is stated with the bifurcurated lens of being in academia and working/ volunteering with non (or no) profit agencies serving children, youth and families. I have found both to be concurrently liberating and constraining. What is especially hopeful in this endeavor of Mayhem is that I collaborate with two male identified CYC workers. Collins (1992) spoke to the challenges of working as a male feminist in the field many years past. The men I currently collaborate with embody the principles of feminist practice and work daily for social justice in their practice and classrooms. As hooks (2000) affirms: "men who actively struggle against sexism have a place in feminist movement. They are our comrades" (p.82). In some

[9] For more information on Mayhem see www.mayhemcollective.ca

respects, our collective was an unlikely and surprising (at least to me) alliance born from traditional means of networking at a conference. What it has become, however, is a concurrently safe and challenging CYC space and means of connection for this feminist practitioner. In a sense, it solidified that feminist practice could explicitly manifest among colleagues and that there was both a sense of hope and resiliency.

The third fold of hope emerges parallel to the third fold of despair, with my consultants. By simply asking how they maintained their integrity, well being, and hope amidst the fear of losing jobs due to neo-liberal government budgeting, rising poverty amongst clients and the general chaos of life, I too, was buoyed. These participants were my "life raft" (Klonis, Endo, Crosby, & Worell, 1997). For example, Teya reflected:

> *That's hard [retaining hope], I go to counselling [laughter] I mean, I do, I have a counsellor. I try to see humor in things, I hang out with kids, kids that I work with but also kids in my personal life, I find that going back to innocence is a beautiful thing. I have hope, and I think sometimes there are times when I feel very hopeless, especially the way the government is working.*

Having concrete ways of supporting oneself becomes clearly important, although her comment regarding innocence implies we at some point occupy a neutral social space. This moves beyond the self- care rhetoric as I experienced so readily digested in the CYC program. As previously stated, the "self" is not an unimportant aspect. But care for the self in the realm of CYC is more than warm baths, meditation and simplified concepts of time and rest. As presented, self- care implies *maintenance* of self, as opposed to active hope, and activities that move beyond the insular self. From my conversations with consultants and my own experience, feminism is an aspect of caring for the self in its multiplicities. I echo Mahoney (1991), who states: "what I am driving at here is that self-

care and social responsibility are not separate domains" (p.5). The same consultant remarks:

> *I see some children who are being raised by the most amazing people and so I see there is hope that way too. Working with youth and families, there's a lot of hope, I see so many beautiful things in so much sadness and poverty and so many generations of abuse and yet there are still people who are singing and dancing and creating babies. Growing these little beautiful beings and then there's this really, really great group of youth that I used to work with called the [name] and they are fantastic. They are the change that, they will be the change we wish to see in the world. They are just a beautiful group of people, so that's how I try to maintain the sanity.*

Yet, there is the recognition that despite active hope, even we, as feminists, are fallible:

> *Nobody has the full integrity, nobody can walk that walk fully and I constantly find ways to putting out, oh wow, that was not fitting with my belief or you know constantly, its subtle or it comes out really directly or sometimes I'm not ready to, I just can't, there's only so much deconstructing one can do. People use the word hypocrites but that's so harsh. I think its just part of who we are, who we are constantly struggling to become, it's rarely there and if we were there maybe we'd disappear and go to another plane, I don't know, but its constant attempt at becoming, yeah, this human pace that we're able to go at without combusting [laughter] (Newman).*

The emphasis on pace is applicable to this particular inquiry in that this is an attempt to pace myself as a scholar, as a feminist. While it is testament to a personal manifesto of where I stand on the landscape of child and youth care practice, it is also a testament to my consultants, who with equifinalic paces, arrived to stand as feminists. Our pace, however, contradicts the pace of the CYC literature in relation to feminist practice and identity. This is not to say that we, as a feminist cohort, are "ahead" of the literature, but the said literature does not reflect the complexities shared with me from my consultants about the meaning making of a feminist identity. This now moves the readers and I to the exploration of the literature as it pertains to feminism and this inquiry.

Chapter Three

Review of the Literature

What of literature?
I have heard poems
and called them research –
I have heard poems and called them datum.
I have digested qualitative rhetoric and
convinced myself of multiple truths
to arrive at a singular means of expression.
What of these words
pounding endlessly from the heart?
Discourse is compounded,
confounded
by disciplinary conformity.
I yearn for stretching free.
(Little)

In sifting through databases (EBSCOhost, PSYCHINFO, Contemporary Women's Issues and Social Work Abstracts) and continuing the search through journals (such as the *Journal of Child and Youth care, CYC Forum, Affilia*, and the *Journal of Marital Therapy*, where I anticipated finding feminist links), I was dismayed to find a lack of explicit reference to feminist identity and experience. Given that my inquiry focused on practitioners who were explicit in their identification as feminist, I was especially interested in studying literature that was also explicitly named as feminist. As Parry (1992) laments: "it is still my experience that in the day-to-day world of child and youth care education and practice, women continue to be there and NOT BE THERE. The question remains: where ARE the women in child and youth care?" (p.11, emphasis in original). Likewise, I began to wonder where the feminists were. After all, I assumed they were "out there" in the literature, but began to ask myself questions. Are the

feminists cloaked in other qualifying language I am unable to recognize? Or are women speaking in a paradoxical manner reflective of limited gendered vocabulary in a patriarchal context? Gergen (2001) postulates:

> Even when women are leaders in their professions, or are exceptional in some arena of life, it is difficult for them to tell their personal narratives according to the forms that would be suitable to their male colleagues. They are in a cultural hiatus, with a paucity of stories to tell (How does one become when no stories can be found?). (p.58)

Gergen's last line above sums up my frustration in the initial literature search. I asked myself, do we simply translate ourselves into others' stories so that we might have a sense of home? The search terms I employed included: feminist identity development, feminist experience, feminism, feminist teaching, and feminist identity, to name a few. The most helpful was "feminism" but required sifting through many abstracts to distil key pieces. Narrowing the scope, however, produced little to no results. Moving into other areas such as social justice, for example, required translating implicit feminist texts and my interest was in the explicit naming of feminism. I began my search in the child and youth care realm, looking specifically at CYC journals. I then moved my search outside into nursing and social work. Augmenting the literature search is a key article from the field of marital counselling. I moved to these particular disciplines because women also dominate them, but also because many professional practitioners do not work in "pure" disciplines. Since CYC practitioners work with a multitude of other professionals, I was curious to see how feminism had developed in allied literature.

It is also important to note what I did not search and why. Initially, I was overwhelmed with the results regarding feminist therapy and perused a few of the articles for a gem quote regarding a feminist identity within the feminist practice discussion. However, upon further investigation, it occurred to me that while some of these articles are worthwhile to explore for practice implications (see, for example, Good, Gilbert, & Scher, 1990; Israeli & Santor, 2000; Parsons, 2001; and Radden, 1996), very few were explicit in addressing the identity of the therapist, and how such an identity was performed, personally and professionally. Like Whipple (1996), I found that "some feminist family authors include introductory remarks in their books which describe their own personal development as feminist family therapists" (p.381), but that "there is little in the professional literature that describes how to become a feminist family therapist" (p.381), not to mention the impact, experience, and meaning of being a feminist therapist in a patriarchal world. Another important aspect of what I did not explore fully was literature in psychology related to developmental models of identity development. Although Downing and Roush's (1985) model of feminist identity development was important and influenced other writing on feminist identity development (McNamara & Rickard, 1989 and Ng, Dunne, & Cataldo, 1995), it does not speak to the multiplicity of feminist development, and is not specific to the human service professions. As such, it is left for another inquiry at another point in my research journey.

Child and Youth Care

Mattingly (2001) proposes a child and youth care code of ethics that asserts:

> The professional practitioner is well versed in current research and theory related to cultural and human diversity including the eight major factors which set groups

> apart from one another, and which give individuals and groups elements of identity: age, class, race, ethnicity, levels of ability, language, spiritual belief systems, educational achievement, and gender differences. (p.10)

She further claims practitioners should "access and critically evaluate, resources that advance cultural understanding and appreciation of human diversity" (p.10). This is no easy feat in relation to gender, when there is little literature to support the notion of appreciating, much less accessing, the cultural reality of gendered practitioners. As Rose and Innes (1992) reflect: "women have contributed as authors or co-authors on articles in the child and youth care field (Fox, 1987; Parry, 1989; Ricks, 1988; VanderVen, 1986) but few of these articles are specific to women's issues" (p.21) *or* feminist practitioners' experiences. The two journals that focused entire issues to feminist/gender issues were the *Child Welfare* (1985) and *Journal of Child and Youth care* (1992). In sum, I accessed 16 articles from these journals.

The *Child Welfare Special Issue* is important for two reasons. One, the very fact that it was published 17 years ago makes it historically important. The commentary of the history of child welfare folds into an on-going history. Costin (1985) reflects: "from its earliest beginnings, the child welfare system has traditionally accepted the consequences of the inordinately unequal power structure of a patriarchal culture" (p.197). She further asserts:

> Despite significant gains in the status of women through legislation and court decisions, the prevailing societal expectation still is that women will accept a 'maternal' code that ascribes to them chief responsibility for nurturing and protecting children. Pressure on women and girls to yield to sex-role stereotypes

> is still heavy throughout our society and is certainly not absent from our public social policies, program eligibility requirements, and treatment theories. (p.197)

The articles within the journal speak to issues of child abuse (Gordon, 1985; Wattenburg, 1985); gender differences between clients and practitioners (Figueira-McDonough, 1985; Hartman & Vinokur-Kaplan, 1985;); foster care (Meyer, 1985); the feminization of poverty (Sarri, 1985); teen parenting (Chilman, 1985); and gender equity (Kamerman, 1985). Only one article is explicit in a minority-feminist perspective (Gould, 1985). Although all these articles touch on feminist themes, there are none that speak directly to what it is to be feminist in the field, vis a vis articulating a feminist identity. If CYC emphasizes knowledge, skills and self, it would be timely to acknowledge the groundbreaking feminist knowledge in the above articles and move into the "self" piece. Specifically, how do CYC practitioners articulate the intersections of politics, philosophy and personal meanings of feminist identities? Has the time come, as Bailey (1997) reflects, to look to the "complexity, multiplicity, and contradiction [that] can enrich our identities as individual feminists and the movement as a whole"(p.26)? I believe so, and my consultants reflect on this throughout the course of this inquiry.

The second important fact of this journal is that the contemporary reader might postulate: "Surely, things have changed and improved since 1985!" Ricks and Garfat (1992) do claim: "there is…evidence of a feminist perspective influencing the field" (p.82), and cite changes to salaries and treatment models. As well, the authors state: "this very issue of the *Journal of Child and Youth Care* is further evidence" (p.82), although it

is duly noted that there has been no specific issue since[10]. Does this imply that the stories brought forth in these issues are "done" with? Does it imply that a feminist consciousness is embodied and that an explicit definition of feminism is redundant? Or are we experiencing a feminist fatigue in the field? Kerr's (1992) reflections on backlash are most intriguing, and concurrently supported by Parry (1992). For example, Kerr (1992) comments: "women's issues are often categorized as feminist issues, making them easy to discard" (p.9) and that feminist CYC practitioners are "battling against a pre-conceived image that has us labelled radical" (p.9). Although she purports that there is a "radical image", I have yet to locate the radical voices. Perhaps this backlash, in it's "subtle ways in which, the care givers, define and integrate treatment" (p.2) encourages implicit feminist values, which are valuable, but not visible and named as such. In other words, has feminism been rendered historical and contrary to contemporary needs of society?

If individuals move away from the primary identity label of "feminist", the reasons and socio-historical contexts would be worthy in and of themselves to explore in another thesis. For the purposes of this inquiry, however, the individuals who hold the identity qualifier are especially of interest to me because they have *sustained* or *acquired* this self-identification in a time when "the feminist revolution has petered out, leaving so many women discouraged and paralysed by the knowledge that, once again, the possibility for real progress has been foreclosed" (Faludi, 1991, p.58). Why do some individuals hold the feminist qualifier as significant? I know that I personally hold onto it because it allows me space in which to reflect on my practice and creates the language I

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[10] I am grateful for Thompson & Samis (2001) for their exceptional work guest editing a special issue dedicated to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered children, youth and practitioners.

need to engage in praxis. This is not to discount that naming my actions as feminist does create barriers for some people, but I do see it as critical for my understanding of what it means to act intentionally.

As a critical feminist, I admit my bias freely in regard to maternal feminism, or what I refer to as "care feminism". I regard care feminism or ethic of care as collusion to an internalized socially constructed stereotypes. Rose and Innes (1992) reflect: "because of this internalized devaluation…practitioners do not pursue radical changes within the field" (p.25). Care feminism, however, is clearly part of some feminist practitioners' perspective, and I do not dispute that care is a concept I engage. Ricks and Garfat (1992) assert: "*yes, there are feminist issues in the field of child and youth care but they could be eliminated if we committed ourselves to caring"* (p.90, original emphasis). Ricks (1992) further asserts what makes her model of care feminist is "the nature of the concern factor"(p.55). Are care and concern equally feminist? Is the feminist identity implicit or explicit in a caring orientation? Parry (1992), who acknowledged the idea of "grooming" (p.12) gendered experience, also uses language indicative of an internal, maternal "female". For example, she comments: "women are *predisposed* to resolving situations in ways that satisfy an array of needs" (p.16, added emphasis). Regardless, if a feminist identity is care driven or politically motivated, there still remains the absence of the feminist herself in an in-depth and self-focused manner. Where this is problematic, despite its poetic assertion, is that the idea of grooming is not separated from the idea that feminists gravitate toward concern as a fulcrum of practice. What of the actual feminist practitioner and her/his perspectives of how such a socially constructed personal identity intersects with professional identity development?

Few of these articles explicitly address the frustrations and challenges of a feminist identity in CYC. Collins (1992), for example, speaks to the specific challenge of embodying a feminist orientation as a male, stating:

> A number of pitfalls are readily apparent for the male counsellor attempting a feminist approach in child and youth care counselling. These pitfalls include: a lack of commitment to change; lack of understanding gender issues; competing influences of media and peers undermining gender issues; and lack of developmental readiness. (p.73)

Thom Garfat (1992) also speaks to this: "I find it difficult, as a man, to be an advocate for changing the conditions which impose on women" (as quoted in Ricks & Garfat, p.87). Rose and Innes (1992) speak to issues of "internalisation" (p.25) of gender stereotypes and "this internalisation results in a poor self-image among practitioners, a lack of critical examination and recognition of what one is doing as skilled and complex labour, and a rapid loss of good practitioners because of exceptionally high burn out" (p.25). Parry (1992) discusses that this leads to invisibility, and that "this is most distressing considering the evidence of increasing visibility of women in the larger professional and political realms" (p.19).

Most frustrating in this endeavour was my attempt to cultivate discussion via the CYC-net[11] regarding feminist identity. I realized that the works found to foster discussion within this literature review were important, but relatively "dated". I desired fresh commentary. The message I posted was thus:

> I am curious if anyone has any good resources pertaining to feminist identity among CYC workers. I am looking for the experiences of feminists in CYC, not

[11] This particular link is referring to www.cycnet.com

> specifically at feminist practices. Although I have some pertinent articles, I am looking for more! I am a grad student at the University of Victoria and welcome not only literature leads, but am also interested in learning of people's experiences (female and male) being feminist in this field. My own experience has certainly had its ups and downs, but being feminist is core to my self and my practice. Any thoughts? (July 21/02).

This resulted in one reply regarding a residential girls' treatment centre in Toronto. On the contrary, a query posted regarding males in CYC work had numerous responses. It asked "is Child and Youth care seen as undesirable for men? Do we need more men? If so, how could be attract more men in to [*sic*] the field? What can we do?" (February 22, 2003, http//www.cyc-net@list.cyc-net.org). Again, I return to the question: have gender issues been "dealt with"? Is feminism a historical remnant? Where are the feminists? Where and what are they writing about themselves and with whom are they dialoguing? Is the silence indicative of people leading busy lives, or more reflective of the lack of interest in feminist experiences? Are my favourite "feminist" professors and colleagues in the field operating under new banners of identity? Determining the CYC-net my final destination on my CYC map, I moved to sister professions for contemporary pieces reflecting the feminist practitioner.

Nursing

Although my research intention is to explore the feminist identity of CYC practitioners, it must be acknowledged that many of those practitioners may have roots in the sister professions. Furthermore, reflecting on these sister professions has been, in my experience, a remarkable mirror to the work I undertake in CYC. That said, what of

nursing and feminist experiences? Legge (1999) historically situates both: "the feminist community has tended to reject professions that women historically dominated. That's a mistake" (p.1). Furthermore, she comments on the lack of explicit language, although she does not find it as problematic as I do: "other people may call it [feminism] something else based on their experiences. Quite frankly, I don't care what people call it as long as it embraces the values that I believe feminism embodies" (p.2). I found this quote striking, because I obviously care very much that my consultants named themselves as feminists. I care that I call myself a feminist, but as the reader will be privy further on, at times this needs to be strategically employed. Kane and Thomas (2000) for example, state: "researchers seeking funding from traditional research-funding agencies know that the inclusion of the "F" [feminism] word often ensures a rejection letter" (p.23).

Although Gary, Sigsby and Campbell (1998) claim: "nurses and all women need to grapple with the feminist position that the world, including health and mental health systems, is dominated by a patriarchal world view" (p.149), they do not address the experience(s) of such grappling. Kane and Thomas (2000) state: "it is necessary to identify the inequities and the invisible stories related to women's lives in nursing in order to better understand the long-term linkages in the relationship between feminism and nursing" (p.17). Bowden (2000) supports this, stating:

> I want to suggest that reflection on women's experiences of caring practices provides rich resources for understanding the complexity and significance of nursing ethics not only respect to its interpersonal ('feminine') imperatives but also in relation to its political ('feminist') requirements. (p.38)

Unearthing the "invisible story", however, illuminates new issues: "the search for a coherent feminist nursing voice could lead us to silencing the voices that complicate our work" (p.23). Furthermore, some feminist nurses are critical of the promotion of one "coherent" voice. For example, Barbee (1994) reflects: "very little of the literature uses a feminist perspective that is relevant to the experiences of women of color, most specifically, the experiences of Black women" (p.495). The search for the feminist experience, then, is potentially influenced by *whose* feminist experience is valued. This is an important reminder for myself as a CYC practitioner because, although there is feminist literature in the CYC canon, there is little that reflects my own identity as Queer, or steps outside the care feminism paradigm.

Social Work

Like most writers commenting on feminism, Collins (1986) qualifies her thesis with the comment: "there is not a single feminist theory, but many" (p.214) and also acknowledges that "there are differing emphases among divergent feminist" (p.214) individuals and groups. Her emphasis on "knowing and discovering woman-experienced, woman-defined reality will ultimately change our conceptions of humanity and reality" (p.215) is passionate, but I am left wondering if "woman-defined" equals "feminist"? After all, this thesis has a plethora of reflections offered by a male feminist, and further, my consultants and I also discuss how feminism moves beyond gender. She states that "it is my contention that social work is fundamentally feminist in its nature" (p.214), but does not expand this thought to argue whether social workers, then, are also fundamentally feminist or what they experience as feminists. Nes and Iadicola (1989) speculate on why some social workers would be feminist: "some social workers, perhaps

feeling the negative impact of sexism or simply recognizing the limitations that sexist oppression creates for both men and women, have turned to feminism as a mode of analysis, and as a means of action" (p.12) but do not expand to say a means of identity.

Sands and Nuccio (1992) recognize the limitations of social work literature, commenting: "although issues pertaining to women are discussed widely in the social work literature, feminist theory informs a limited number of these writings" (p.489). Although I am an outsider looking into social work, I was impressed with historical situating of the profession (see, for example, Walkowitz, 1990) and reviewing the profession's journals for sexism and gender invisibility (see for example, Barretti, 2001 and Grise-Owens, 2002). Yet, alongside nurses and CYC practitioners,

> Less attention, however, has been paid to the social worker herself. An important subject for analysis, the female social worker [but note, not feminist in definition] brings to her professional task a complex matrix of social and self-defined roles around the issue of giving care. (Freedberg, 1993, p.535)

This begs the question: what complexities do CYC workers experience in naming themselves? How do labels constrain, liberate, or both?

Family Counselling

The literature review could not be complete without acknowledging an influential article from the field of marital counselling. In fact, much in line with the unexpected turns of qualitative inquiry, I finally stumbled across a study on which I could mirror my intentions. Specifically, Whipple (1996) conducted "a qualitative research study which involved in-depth interviews with women in the greater Chicago area who self-identified as feminist family therapists" (p.381). This study is of particular importance to me, as I

was beginning to feel despondent in not being able to locate the feminist practitioner and her/his experiences in the literature and, like Whipple, I had experienced "wondering if my experience of struggling to integrate my feminist values into my practice…was unique" (p.394) and concur with her when she states: "perhaps a significant contribution of this study can, therefore, make is to help end feelings of isolation for other feminist family therapists who feel they have little support in their work" (p.394). I have stated previously that bridging my isolation was a clear prerogative in this endeavour. Clearly, the limited sources of feminist autobiography available lends to the need of this research as "typically, the professions have placed emphasis on identifying the needs of the client, not the worker" (Ricks, 1992, p.55). A good example of this statement in a feminist context is the popularity of books such as *Reviving Ophelia* (Pipher, 1994) and *School Girls* (Orstein, 1994). Although these books have informed my practice and revealed the reality of (some) young women, I am still left wondering about the therapist/practitioner/author/feminist. And as Whipple (1996) suggests: "although feminists have profoundly influenced the field of family therapy, little has been written about the process by which these women came to identify themselves as feminist family therapists" (p.381). Immersed in the literature, and honouring my own epistemological foundation, I set forth with a clearer picture of the absence I sought to fill. Specifically, the reader is invited into a conversation about how I sought to bridge my passion for feminism with my theory. This is no easy exercise given the qualitative terrain and the topic of feminism; however, methodological synthesis provides the means with which to explore this new territory of CYC practice and philosophy. The next chapter introduces the reader to the methodology and method guiding this inquiry.

Chapter Four

Methodology

Women

Women are going blind from too much data
and the lean beginnings of truth
starting as the skin of a dead cactus
against a surface of flesh made raw
ending somewhere far into the dark canals
of children's dreams, ending somewhere
near the end of the tunnel where we give up
looking for the stark white light of the exit (stark white?)
and start digging into the walls
with our hands, eating
through the rock of the mountain
travelling slowly toward the blue sky
travelling slowing toward the beautiful
bodies of our naked children
our women and our men
slithering through the long measure of stone,
saintly worms, wet and subversive,
travelling slowly until our bodies open suddenly
like clamshells or dinosaur eggs
and in the mountain air against the sky
we see each other with open eyes
what we really look like.
What we are.
(Scheier, 1989, p.203)

I, too, was going blind, or at least cross eyed, with the sheer amount of data and as reflected above, trying to discover "*what we are*" and "*what we really look like*" as feminist practitioners, or who we were. Despite having "only" three consultants, there was an immense richness to their narratives that betrayed a singular method of representation. Originally, I had conceptualized this study as a narrative inquiry, and all this "data" would be holistic storylines, plots and moments of suspense in discussing feminism. It may even be possible to convince the reader that this is narrative inquiry

given the twists, turns and torrents involved, but this will be addressed further on. If it is possible to fall in love with theory, then narrative was certainly my most passionate lover. The works of Bruner (1990), Clandinen and Connolly (2000), Frank (1991; 1995; 2004), Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis (1993), Lather and Smithies (1997), Lorde (1981), Mischler (1995), Polkinghorne (1988) and White and Epston (1990) all spoke to my heart as the "right" and most integral method of doing research. I am also very much drawn to psychological and academic writing that draws on myth and "fictional" story to illuminate the tensions in identity and discourse (Newman, 1995 and Pinkola Estes, 1992;). I speak in story, although for the purposes of academia I must also speak in theory. For example, when asked to explicate a theoretical concept such as agency, I often revert to the subjective story space to communicate my meaning. When reflecting on my consultants holistically, they, too, would often share a story in response to a question, which in the words of Penelope, "*it's the same kind of theoretical fancy words, but also knowing that, that's not really for a lot of people*". Stories are our common human currency, and I was privileged to hear stories from three articulate, intelligent and passionate people. That said; this is not a narrative inquiry as originally intended. Yes, it shares narrative elements, but calling a piece of academic work narrative because of my love of narrative is not integral to my own position as researcher. Yes, I work with narratives and, yes I have co-constructed conversations with my consultants. Just as Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that all language is metaphorical, it could easily be said that all language, discourse and research is, on some level, narrative. It is not so much that I am reluctant to engage in narrative work. After all, I am working with particular stories told in a particular way. At the same time, I view theory building and thesis

writing as concurrently process and product. When focused on the product of a narrative inquiry, I found myself focused on the commodified version of the educational process, as opposed to the emergent process drawing me in different directions. I was becoming more interested in the product and how it was packaged. For example, metaphors in qualitative research are taken up as the "hot" way to frame experience (Thorne, 2004). Likewise, methodological theories cycle in their popularity. So, while narrative is cutting edge, exciting, and certainly draws attention, it simply did not fit for this inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) comment: "this learning to think narratively *at the boundaries* between narrative and other forms of inquiry is, perhaps, the single most important feature of successful narrative thinking" (p.25, emphasis in original). While I do not dispute that thinking intersectionally, on the margins or borders is important work[12], I also feel that for too long I have stuffed feminism into other people's theoretical paradigms, and effectively, diluted it's potency. Working "at the boundaries" sounds enticing, especially for those of us who consider that homeland, but often that means laboriously translating components of a marginalized and/or stereotyped discourse so one can slide a toe beyond such boundaries for recognition.

So, what then of this process? If not narrative, in its original theoretical repository, then what framework would be suitable to capture the cadence? After all, there was a rhythm erupting that rang counter to the original score. If "we humans have exhibited a growing fascination with ourselves, our self awareness, and our awareness of our awareness" (Mahoney, 1991, p.4), then what constitutes an academically appropriate

[12] For excellent discussion on margin and border work, readers are referred to Standford Friedman; 1998; Narayan & Harding, 2000; and hooks, 2000, to name a few.

and personally satisfying means of communicating this awareness? After all, this is a qualitative undertaking, and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) claim:

> Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p.2)

Well, yes, this study is about meaning, such as how my consultants made meaning of their experience as feminists, but I neither studied my consultants in their personal, professional or preferred settings, nor kept their transcripts holistically intact. So, at this juncture, all I knew is that this was a qualitative study, and as previously discussed, not narrative in the pure theoretical sense. For a MA level endeavor, and given "this must be where your feminist rubber meets your methodological road" (Gergen, 2001, p.91) one can image the methodological crisis this created, where, effectively I was "screaming for action without theory" (Hanisch, 2000, p.115). I was looking desperately for a theoretical anchor, not knowing a singular anchor could have potentially have sunk me. At least I could locate my self/ my selves and my research in the postmodern arena. Lather (1991) speaks to this position, stating:

> Postmodernism / poststructuralism is the code name for the crisis of confidence in Western conceptual systems. It is borne out of the uprising of the ex-centric, the revolution in communication technology, the fissures of a global multinational hyper-capitalism, and our sense of the limits of Enlightenment rationality, all creating a conjunction that shifts our sense of who we are and what is possible. (p.159)

I do identify with Lather's conceptualization of the "ex-centric" in that I see myself always left of child and youth care pedagogy and practice, and at times, right of feminist action. I feel I do not fit in the world of CYC, be that my experience as both an undergraduate and graduate student and/or in the realm of conferencing, publication writing or advocacy. I also feel I do not fit in the world of feminism, specifically women/gender studies, queer theory due to my various intersections of identity (femme, CYC practitioner, social activist). In the course of this inquiry, I had a dream that I had finished my thesis defense and a colleague asks me: "So, given all this, do you still consider yourself a child and youth care worker?" To which my reply in the dream is: "No, it is time to move on". Although at the time of waking I interpreted this as an explicit message to leave the field, in retrospect, it represents not a call to leave the field per say, but rather to re-interpret my viewing, languaging, and performance in the very same field. Performance, in this sense, parallels Butler's (as quoted in Salih, 2004) gender performativity. It is not mere "acting" as the term performance is connotated. Rather, Butler speaks to cultural norms that shape our activity within any given context:

> So, yes, there is an aspect of performance, but that does not mean that the meaning of the performance is established by the intention of the actor-hardly. What are being performed are the cultural norms that condition and limit the actor in the situation; but also in play are the cultural norms of reception, which may or may not accord with the ones that are constituting a situation so that we actually have a retrospective of constitution of the performance through the norms of reception – and this can produce really interesting problems of cultural translation and cultural misunderstanding. (pp. 345-346)

Given that my experience of feminism and feminist performance in child and youth care has been less than savory due to feeling compelled to translate my Queerly feminist language and gestures into appropriate child and youth care language, I pondered on how to incorporate my feminist being with my child and youth care training for the purposes of this inquiry. I wondered why I had strayed so far from my feminist roots, and why all qualitative research paradigms seemed so difficult to use as frames in the research process. Was I trying to accomplish a women studies degree under the auspices of child and youth care or trying to frame child and youth care work within feminism? Was this, indeed, feminist research as I had hoped? Gorelick (1991) warns: "merely collecting descriptive statistics or experiential data about women does not constitute feminist research. Feminist research must be part of a process by which women's oppression is not only described but challenged" (p.462). At first glance, I was disheartened because scattered all over the walls and floor of my office were stories from feminists. But they are stories of struggle; they are stories of challenge. They were not papered pockets of neutral discourse. The process of moving between transcripts, theory and practice resulted in a rich incubation process. It is the dialectical piece that is the essential division between "flat", uncritical storytelling and critical, engaged feminist analysis. This moves us into the realm of praxis, which according to Olsen (2000) is part of working with theoretical synthesis.

The Greek root of praxis is "to do". As a measure of my own catalytic validity (Lather, 1991) as a researcher, I asked myself how this particular inquiry was, indeed, a demonstration of praxis. As Lather muses: "theory is too often used to protect us from the awesome complexity of the world" (p.62). Yet, theory is also complex, specifically

when attempting to capture the complexity, or cadence, that Lather speaks to. No single theoretical method could demonstrate a commitment to praxis. Furthermore, in consultation with Teya, she reminded me that the multi-layered conversations regarding feminism were robust in their multiple influences and origins, and hence, a synthesis (Hoskins, 1997). This synthesis grew out of interaction with texts, negotiating the institutional terrain of the university, and what Yeatman (1994) refers to as kitchen table conversation.

Kitchen Table Conversations

> *I think being political can come in many forms. I love sitting around the table with my family and family friends and just listening to their conversations and then maybe just throwing out a comment, you know, there was a mom begging on the street the other day and she had a baby in a stroller. And what are we going to do about that? And how come we've let the government do this? Aren't we appalled that now single moms are only getting $260 a month for living expenses, you know? I'll just throw out a fact or two and then see where the conversation goes [laughter]. And that, to me, is how I see myself being a feminist. (Teya)*

The metaphor of kitchen table is important in an inquiry revolving around feminist identity. The kitchen was/is a concurrent site of women's oppression and liberation. I think of my mother-in-law who moved to rural New Brunswick from the bustling city of Montreal and discovered she needed to bake bread, and lots of it. Her kitchen experience is far different from mine – which has included taping my interviews with consultants. There is also a rich history of women's publishing and revolution that has taken place over kitchen tables (Smith & Smith, 1981). Yeatman (1994) speaks to this, stating: "kitchen table conversation can become a public space, not because those using it are planning their next political action, but because their discussion and debate are politicizing their interaction and relationships" (p.114). Of course, some of us are, indeed, planning our next political action. But these plans do not emerge out of

telepathic invitation. Ideas, directions, means of achieving liberation are all mediated through our languaging of experience and desire. For example, Newman reflects on conversations he has with a friend:

> *He constantly challenges me, I use a certain word, and he asks: can you use a different word? And I went why? And he's like, 'well that comes from…' or 'I just need to understand it'. He is constantly stopping me and taking words that come loaded, and he asks to use three or four more words to describe something, constantly doing it, and just that thought alone I've found really liberating. He does spoken word, and he comes from this tweaking the mind to be able to think freely. Constantly trying to free himself and that's part of his process, is stopping using catch all words, dead words, is what I think he would probably call it. They've lost their meaning because they are so overused and misused.*

As a women studies student, I would often change spelling of words as an act of reclamation. For example, "woman" became "womyn". Changing the words we use to communicate verbally, however, is more complex. My personal challenge right now is to drop consumer discourse from my language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), but as Newman points out "*that language is so ingrained, and a lot of isms*". Interestingly enough, the following dialogue unfolded:

Newman – Lame is a word that I'm trying to take out of my language, I just realized in the last year, thinking about the roots, whoa, abilism.

Nicole – I was talking to someone who was trying to take pronouns out of their vocabulary, I wish them good luck with that.

Newman – Oh boy, we have to evolve in language, it's keeping us back.

Although this is not a discourse analysis, I did chuckle to myself as I noticed my clumsy attempt to remove pronouns by defaulting to the plural. Further, Newman's response of "oh boy" resulted in our laughing about it. The mere awareness, however, becomes the catalyst for change. And as Gergen (1999) reflects:

> In the societal arena, there is much to be gained through this separation of persons from discourse – of seeing language as a vehicle for relating as opposed to a conveyor of the foundations of the real and the good …we can avoid being drawn into the tendency to discourse as a reflection of unified psyches, or as reflecting a personal essence. (p.153)

Despite this being, as Dr. Hoskins has pointed out in personal dialogue, conversational research, it still requires me to explicate how these conversations were analyzed and interpreted. Below, I detail the three major theoretical influences that I have drawn upon to produce a synthesized methodological approach. These include feminist post structuralism, social constructionism, and although perhaps not a theory, poetry. The particular components drawn from each are discussed in more detail further in this chapter. The above conversations regarding language certainly saturated all the process from interview questions, process and analysis, and finally, the very words being typed. Specifically, the renaming of our realities has been a salient condition. As Lather (1992) points out:

> Feminism's long standing tendencies toward self-reflexivity provide some experience of both rendering problematic and provisional our most firmly held assumptions and nevertheless, acting in the world, taking a stand. Women's simultaneous experiences of positions of both privilege and marginality is the material ground for the development of practices of self-interrogation and critique. (p.129)

This runs parallel to how my consultants reflected on feminism. Penelope, for example, commented:

Q: Do you see feminism as a force?

A. Oh, well, I hope so, [sigh] yeah, I do, force, well as an ideology, as a way to approach things. I think it changes things, it changes the way we look at the world, and how we act in this world.

The synthesis of theory I have constructed for the purposes of this inquiry is supported by the work of Freire (2003):

> I cannot understand human beings as simply *living*. I can understand them only as historically, culturally and socially *existing*. I can understand them only as beings who are makers of their 'way,' in the making of which they lay themselves open to or commit themselves to the 'way' that they make and that therefore remakes them as well. (p.97, emphasis in original)

My understanding of this quote is that the "way" Freire discusses is socially constituted. If constructivists believe that "we are moving in the midst of forces far greater than ourselves, yet we have voice and choice within those forces" (Mahoney, 2003, p.5), how does that account for "constrained choice" (O'Brien Hallstein, 1999)? The forces that Mahoney alludes to are not just "wind and stars" (p.5) as he poetically asserts, but lived oppression. An example is one that I share with Moraga (1981):

> My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and oppression, and it continues to be the most tactile reminder to me that we are not free human beings. (p.28-29)

Does this make me a victim? Well, I don't consider being Queer a *Well of Loneliness* (Hall, 1928) sentence, but I am acutely aware of the dangers that come with being Queer. This danger is one that constantly shapes how I see my world and perform in it. This social location is one that is, indeed, different from someone who claims a heterosexual

identity. Our experiences in a homophobic world are fundamentally different. So, how I understand feminism is ultimately filtered through this, and this is different from some of my consultants. This is not to say that we are "locked" in our subjectivity; what makes this synthesis of theory so critical is the ability to be self-reflexive and open to other interpretations of feminist identity. This is an attempt to move toward what O' Brien Hallstein (1999) refers to as "post modern caring":

> A postmodern caring… offers some possibility for diverse people, who have interpretive capabilities and intentionality, to deliberate together across their differences, to make choices, and to be held accountable for those choices in moral reasoning.
>
> (p. 34)

As the reader will be privy, my consultants are indeed interested and active in intentional dialogue across differences, and it is through feminism that this is made possible and desirable.

Post Structuralism

Another stem contributing to this synthesis is that of feminist post structuralism. I have drawn heavily on the work of Weedon (1987) to situate language, discourse and power in relation to identity. Specifically, "given the long history of the patriarchal silencing of women, it is crucial that women speak out for ourselves and occupy resistant subject positions while men work to deconstruct masculinity and its part in the exercising of patriarchal power" (p. 173). As the reader will be privy, consultants do speak as women and men opposed to patriarchal discourses, or "scripts" as my consultant Newman shared with me. Furthermore, they speak in transcendence of, and at times,

opposition to, traditional child and youth discourse. They speak of social location, not milieu, privilege and oppression, not self- awareness, and social action as opposed to social interaction. These subtle nuances of language indicate a shift in perspective and orientation in navigating both child and youth care and an espoused feminist identity. Myself, I have struggled with articulating a feminist "space" in child and youth care and post structural writing such as Weedon (1987) and Butler (as quoted in Salih, 2004) have offered up the potential of creating such space through theoretical construction and feminist action.

Much like any theory, there are accusations of any "post" theory falling prey to its own deconstructionist origins. Standford Friedman (1998) speaks to post structuralism, saying: "instead of freeing a multiplicity and infinity of readings, it [poststructuralism] has hardened into a hegemonic orthodoxy that deadens readings into a repetitions of the same" (p. 182). Her concern, like many other theorists, is that something that begins as revolutionary in its construction becomes reified and unchallenged. The same claim could be made of "feminism". For example, although I still call myself a feminist post inquiry, and identified as one previous to this undertaking, the meaning and actions of the term has changed, at least for me personally. At the same time, it is the same word, and vulnerable to a plethora of subjective interpretations. How do I/we claim and transform theoretically embedded language? Again, to quote Stanford Friedman:

> The word widely used for this process is *recuperation*. The *author* is being resurrected; *agency* is once more on the agenda. *Self* and *experience* may even one day be rehabilitated (that may be going to [*sic*] far). However, in being recuperated, these terms are not reappearing as they once were. Battered and

> buffeted in the poststructuralist storm, they have a different, more self-conscious and self-critical texture, one that weaves aspects of poststructuralist discourse with other threads. (p.189, emphasis in the original)

As such, the post structural methods employed in this text may be familiar, but it is my hope they carry new meaning for the reader.

Social Constructionism

Specifically, the work of Mary Gergen (2001) has shaped, informed and personally validated my endeavor, and this cannot be denied. For example, she states:

> My criteria for emancipatory feminist research are (a) to acknowledge my research goals and to advance them, (b) to create an effective opportunity for change for participants in the research endeavor, and (c) to be personally open to change in unanticipated ways as a result of the commingling of influences of all participants. (p.104)

I was very attracted to the explicit nature of her statement, but also have come to realize that acknowledging my research goals was no easy feat, although furthering understanding of feminism in the field of CYC was one. This inquiry is less about emancipation of consultants than it is about the "space between" (Little, 2004a) that creates the *potential* for emancipation. Perhaps the emanicipitation is in the choosing/ naming of theory, and Gergen does remind us that naming is "a political act" (Gergen, 2001, p. 3). Choosing the work of social constructionism, as opposed to constructivism, was an intentional and political act on my part. For too long, I have sat with unease in the constructivist chair and could not name my discomfort. Social constructionism acknowledges exactly what Gergen herself says regarding the "male story" always being

told at the expense of women and I personally resonate more as a feminist to theories of social constructionism. Her resistance to standard texts also serves the purposes of this inquiry. Despite being a thesis, it is peppered with poetry, which is discussed below. In terms of social constructionism, this also means my experience of this research occurs in relationship to my consultants. The analogy that comes forth is that of music acquisition (taste as opposed to skills). I can list you many songs and musicians with whom I resonate. At the same time, this appreciation is expanded in speaking to others about musical tastes. From interacting with musician interviews, attempting to describe, in clumsy language, how a song "sounds" creates more dialogue and then exchange, and possibly the production of music. I had the opportunity to produce a musical CD this year, and "final" products were a synthesis of my own thoughts, words, experiences and the negotiation of the interpretation of my creative partner. It was the clearest example of non-summativity. Likewise, theory building also comes from the interaction of text, speech and relationship - whether that relationship consists of supervisor/student, book/reader, society/individual. This focus on dialectical process opens space for myself as the researcher to be embedded in my transcripts, but also allows for a relationship with text that is explicitly non-objective and constantly evolving. My attraction to Gergen also lies in her own reputation of performativety and this strain is represented in the next section of poetry.

Poetry

> Let us play with story lines. Let us not always conform to androcentric styles. Let us demur. Maybe stories don't need lines. Perhaps they need to step out of the

queue and refuse to march in orderly progression. Let us not stick to the point. Let us improvise! (p.70)[13]

Although I uneasily assign the label of poet to myself, I do see the role of poetry as essential to both providing an audit trail of my experience as well as simply embracing what cannot be said in a linear or socially predictable way. I have written elsewhere (Little, 2004b) a purely poetic description of my process as researcher and believe poetry to be the most "authentic" means of expression. This is not to say it is "truth" or "fact". As qualitative research moves to stretch the boundaries of "representation" and "truth", so, too must I challenge the reader with what they interpret as "fact" and what they may interpret as "fiction"? As Weedon reflects: "modes of subjectivity, like theories of society or versions of history, are temporary fixings in the on-going process in which any absolute meaning or truth is constantly deferred" (p.173). In the course of this inquiry, I was challenged by someone about why I communicate in poetry instead of just words? In a sense, poetry serves the purpose of multiple deferrals, and at the same time, a multitude of interpretation. Of course, in keeping with the dialectical process, I responded to the aforementioned individual in a poem:

I speak in story.

A friend once said in frustration:
"why put everything into poems
when it is just easier to say?"

Yet, words strung together
form narratives.
Letters become stories,
they are the vehicles of our

[13] For maximum effect of this quote, feather boas are recommended

non fictional fictions.
We are living breathing poems,
waiting to be captured in cadence.

Where does poetry come from,
indeed?
The labour comes from interaction,
not extraction.
I'd happily live in
so-called imaginary poetics-
there is no blame assigned there.

Just as my sentences, assertions and paragraphs will be interpreted, so in turn, will my poetry. Yet, poetry has always been my hermeneutically- encrypted journal recording my life, my lives, my struggle(s) and my triumphs. For example, I also wrote of:

Trust me- the world has
crystallized recently-
I break splinters of conversations
that bleed in my mouth,
cut my tongue with enunciation,
shred social proprietary with articulation.
Speech is painful, isn't it?

Poetry is not impervious to critique, but when written out of desire or frustration, becomes a simultaneous filter and barrier to such critique. Other researchers have also found poetry to be useful in the research process (see for example, Finley, 2003; Johnson & Jarvis, 2002; Saunders, 2003; and Piirto, 2002). Of course, not all the poetry included stems from my own pen. I have included various poems by others that I have stumbled across in search of the thesis muse. Perhaps stumble is an ill- conceived word. These other poems that are included, as well as the theories I have chosen, are ones with which I resonate. This is a key aspect to how I threaded the theories together, and what spoke to me throughout my conversations with the consultants. I will first address the theories, then discuss resonance in more detail when illuminating methods.

Threading the Theory

In retrospect, it would have been far easier to pick a single methodological theory and apply it to the analysis, than to attempt theoretical synthesis. At the same time, this would have resulted in taking the voices of consultants and diluting them to fit a hegemonic worldview, regardless of their diverse nuances. In a state of theoretical paralysis, I began to question the process I usually most emphatically protest: the picking of a variable to suit a need or purpose. When I asked Mary Gergen what her thoughts were on synthesizing poststructuralism and social constructionism in order to more fully understand identity processes, her reply, in part, was:

> We are looking at the ways that features of individuality come into being in the context of a relational moment. This means that something like identity is an emergent, within a relational context... people have potentials to be many things, according to

> their experiences in the past with others, and vicariously, so when they engage in conversations and activities with others, they become... This perspective moves against the idea of a fixed, internalized sense of self.... and allows for the multiplicity of selves.. none the "real self" but many that are more or less potential.
>
> (personal communication, January 9th, 2005)

Her correspondence, as well as dialogue with two respected colleagues (Dr. Marie Hoskins and Michael Burnett), solidified the idea that theory can, and must be, reflective (and challenging) of the study but also based on my own beliefs as a researcher. As well, this synthesis is congruent to my consultants' reflections on multiplicity, ambiguity and fluidity of identity. Just as there can be no one fixed identity, there can be no singular theory with which to describe and interpret it.

Method

Method

This is resolution to chaos, if only temporary.
Or temporary chaos;
A sense of placement, standpoint,
replacement of the so called inevitable.
I crave the creativity,
I breathe the poetry,
Does it seem strange to say I have felt displaced?
Living on borders that seem artificially constructed and maintained,
I am a nomad who rarely leaves her house.
(Little)

"Because if thinking is crucially a matter of finding an individual voice it is also about understanding oneself in relation to the cultural traditions within which one finds

oneself; it involves, therefore, thinking in dialogue with others" (Winter, 1998, p.67). This idea of dialogue is essential to the research process, and is, in essence, the flesh on the bones of the paradigm. Dialectical process is a key ingredient in critical-feminist and constructionist paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.113). For the purposes of this research, I conducted in-depth interviews with 3 participants. Two of the participants, Newman and Teya, hold Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth care from the University of Victoria, although they graduated in different cohorts. Penelope holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and is currently attending a post secondary education program to become an educator. The reader is reminded that self-identification as a child and youth care worker was a criterion, not formal education in CYC. As such, the language and experience reflected in this thesis is strongly indicative of the context in which all three work, and the education they have drawn on. There was a ten- year interval in age, ranging from 25 to 35.

Interviews were guided by the work of Kvale (1996) and Dr. Marie Hoskins. Kvale states: "interview research is a craft, that if well carried out, can become an art"(p.13). The art of conversation, of dialogue, is a critical component for presenting the canvas onto which such introspection can occur. Interviews were intended as the stage for participant's feminist experiences, and I am grateful for the learning I took from working with Dr. Hoskins that informed my interviews. I aimed to emulate Dr. Hoskins' empathetic and open-minded approach to research consultants. Specifically, her genuine curiosity of peoples' meaning making was essential to this study. No definition of feminism was provided, rather, I followed the cue of Rose and Innes (1992) who comment: "it was imperative that each of the respondents try to articulate their definition

of feminism, focusing not necessarily on theoretical or abstract meaning, but on their personal impressions of what a 'feminist perspective' might mean for them" (p.25). Interviews were semi-structured. The purpose of a semi-structured format was to address potential commonalities, but left ample room for each participant to unfold her/his story. The purpose of questions is to unearth meaning: "through meaning questions, we invite people into a reflecting position from which they can regard different aspects of their stories, themselves, and their various relationships" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p.136). For example, questions I was curious to know about are thus:

1. Where do you see your story of feminism beginning?
2. Was there a social, personal, or professional catalyst to your self-identity as a feminist?
3. How does your feminist identity inform your practice as a CYC practitioner?
4. How would you describe your feminism(s)?
5. When has your feminist identity been a barrier (or a barrier to others) in your CYC practice?
6. Does your feminist identity extend to other self-identifications (such as sexual orientation) and how do you merge the multiplicities of self-identity?

These questions served as an entry point into dialoguing about feminist identity, but did not intend to restrict participants to only discussing this particular identity qualifier. Question 6, does your feminist identity extend to other self-identifications and how do you merge the multiplicities of self-identity, for example, intended to open dialogue about the intersections and complexity of identities. The questions served as guiding points for me as well. As a qualitative researcher, I approached this with the wild

optimism of rich story telling, but also with the trepidation of academic uncertainty. Peck (1995) reflects: "to be maximally successful the search process should be multi-faceted. Maps alone are not enough. Guidebooks are not enough. You need to use both maps and guidebooks. And then to stay out on the lookout even when there's nothing that either of them point to" (p.102). Essentially, I needed the maps to view my travels, but the view may not be what I was anticipating, and that is equally valuable and inevitable in the process of dialoguing with consultants.

Analysis

Given the methodological assumptions stated above, the reader must know what was important to pay attention to and why in the process of analysing the transcripts. I had three consultants who were recruited from Vancouver Island and Vancouver. Although technically criteria sampling in that each had to identify as a feminist and a CYC practitioner, it was essentially a snowball sample, given people referred others to me. I consider myself the fourth consultant, given the space I occupy in this thesis and the intense self- exploration this has been catalyst to. This is supported by Lather (1991), who states:

> This de-centering of the author via *intertextuality* is a demonstration of how the author is inevitably inscribed in discourse created by others, preceded and surrounded by other texts, some of which are evolved, some not. In my own writing, the accumulation of quotes, excerpts and repetitions is also an effort to be

> 'multi-voices', to weave varied speaking voices together as opposed to putting forth a singular 'authoritative' voice. (p. 9, emphasis in original)

Since each consultant had two interviews each, I accumulated approximately 60 pages of verbatim conversation, and countless pages in my own journals. In retrospect, transcribing the conversations myself was essentially the first wave of analysis. It was through the transcription that I was stimulated to move between the transcripts and other reading, attempting to make sense of the multiple layers of meaning that were being illuminated. How could a deceptively simple process – dialogue- be so very complex? And what was I going to do with the mountain of words I had?

The first process was to read in a holistic manner. This entailed reading through all the transcripts in one sitting. This, of course, was not a neutral exercise, as I made notes in the margins and essentially, had conversations with the conversations. Since this is not a phenomenological study, I was not necessarily looking only for the "essence" of feminist identity, but commonalities emerged across the conversations and these were noted. After holistically holding these conversations, I did, in all honesty, put them down and incubated my thoughts, notes and poems. This may not sound especially rigorous, but my experience with writing has taught me I must do this. Much like Newman:

> *I make reference to evolving, to moving forward and to seeing signs, like spiritual kinds of signs. Its profound how much pattern there is in this world and things happen in pattern so I really embrace it and I'd hope for some really powerful metaphoric events that happen that, I'm constantly like, when you believe in it you look for it and you find them, right? Sign after sign after sign, its like, wow.*

Metaphorical signs began to surface, through tarot readings, conversations, and simple gestures such as "you might like this book". The most profound metaphorical moment, however, came from walking in downtown Victoria. A glint in a store window caught

my eye, so I stopped to observe what it was that had captured my attention. In the window was a three- dimensional copper wind spiral with a prism hanging in the middle of it. As it spun, different sides of this helix like wind chime were moved to the forefront of my vision while others turned to hindsight. And it didn't stop moving, it was constantly in motion. And I thought: this is identity. Part of the spiral was more predominant given the conditions it was exposed to, such as wind. Yet, the other components were not invisible to my sight. Likewise, my consultants moved forward or receded in their stories of feminism depending on the context that was being described.

My conceptualisation of identity as fluid, interconnected and evolving impacts the analysis in a remarkable way. Since there was no one fixed identity, no singular truth, I moved to emergent thematic analysis. Emergent analysis runs parallel to Newman and I was looking for signs and metaphors. This is not to say that themes suddenly emerged outside of me. For example, post incubation, I asked myself what was resonating and why. Navigating the murky waters in between theory and transcripts, various themes began to emerge. Language was especially salient. As Weedon (1987) reflects:

> Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed.* The assumption that subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined, but socially produced. Subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices – economic, social, and political – the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power. Language is not the

> expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific. (p.21, emphasis in original)

Alongside the relationship of feminist identity and language, what also rose to the surface were waves of meaning, namely, meaning made around gender, coming to a feminist orientation, and projections of why feminism is feared, embraced and where it may evolve to. These concepts, although linked between my methodological synthesis and the words of my consultants, are also biased by my sense of urgency to relieve myself of the isolation I felt as a feminist in child and youth care. For example, I explicitly asked in my letter of recruitment: " I SEE FEMINISM AS PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL *AND* POLITICAL – HOW DO YOU SEE IT?" Clearly, this influences my dialoguing, reading and analysis that followed. Linking my theoretical synthesis and my research question: how do child and youth care practitioners make meaning of their feminist identity, created a space in which resonance with certain aspects became clear to me. As such, this thesis is particularly focused on concepts of gender, language, performance, resistance, and evolution of feminism. I now turn to these with the hope that these also resonate with the reader.

Chapter Five

Coming to Feminism

Stone Circle

I cast this circle of
14 stones,
a prayer to the Goddess,
a sacred space,
safe from outer harm.
Each stone for a sister slain
Each ribbon for a sister's pain.
Ruthless force
stole their precious breath,
crumpled, defeated they lay
each body framed in crimson red.
In this circle I fill with tears,
this coven empty,
14 deaths were real,
14 sisters filled with bullet holes.
(Little, 1993)

The reader has thus far been privy to my own coming to feminism, and the above constitutes my first intentional feminist poem, penned in 1993. The reader has also been privy to how I have struggled with a feminist identity throughout this inquiry and this will further be explicated in the following chapters. I now turn my attention to my consultants and their narratives of coming to feminism. Although I have offered some cursory details of my consultants in the methodology chapter, tradition begs me to offer fuller descriptions of each consultant, prior to sharing their narratives. I struggle with this, however, on many levels. Firstly, "doing" descriptions of each implicitly renders me an expert, outsider witness to her/his social location. It is all too easy for me to categorize each participant on the basis of gender, age, sexual orientation, and so forth.

But these would be my interpretations. For example, two participants are in heterosexual relationships – does this "make" them heterosexual or imply that they identify as heterosexual? Not necessarily. Granted, for the purposes of this inquiry, I did know they all identified as feminist. Secondly, language is problematized in this thesis in a manner that behooves me to be critically aware of my use of language when discussing consultants. Choosing not to use oppressive, patriarchal language to fit my participants into categories does not represent an "easy out"; on the contrary, discussing the multiplicity of identities takes far more cognitive and intentional effort. As an instructor, I often see students render the complexity of identity invisible in the name of attempting to be non-judgmental. That is not my intention, as I do not dismiss the history that contributes to the present self representation, but rather recognize that history is multiple, shifting and what informs a person's "here and now" also shifts, or as Currie (1999) reflects: "as constructs, gendered identities are constantly being re-enacted through practices that express a continual process of becoming as well as being" (p.4).

More important than sketching surface caricatures of three people, I was interested in the following questions. How did they come to see feminism as salient, as political, as "theirs"? Who were their feminist role models or who/what did they work actively in their lives to resist? Was there a particular moment of feminist recognition? As I have discussed elsewhere (Little, 2005), I distinctly remember spending time outside in the hot Ontario sun as a shirtless 5 year old. When I asked my father if I could walk up the street to visit a friend, I was told to put a shirt on first. This is my first recollection of different rules for different genders. These moments, in second wave American feminist

language, are referred to as "click moments". Crosbie (1997) describes this concept beautifully:

> It was Gloria Steinem who used the term *click* to describe that moment of feminist self-awareness, the quick epiphany that has a private and public resonance: the click of high heels on sidewalks or tapped together in a ruby glitter; two fingers snapping; scissor blades closing; the release of a gun's safety; the flick of a light switch; a catch in the machinery; the clatter of nails on a typewriter; a lock yielding to a key (no page numbers in this anthology, emphasis in original).

Such "clicks" would infer that a coming to feminism, of gendered awareness, consists of a one- time event. This has been criticized by Smith and Smith (1981) as a white phenomenon that does not account for the life long embodiment of being of color, racialized and the subsequent racism one endures. One does not wake up one day and comprehend racialized or sexualized oppression. Identity shifts are not one, giant, cognitive and social leap, but the ability to name them *can* be. For example, Newman comments that

> *I didn't need to be converted into the thought [of feminism], I was just like, oh yeah! It just put words to what I understood.*

This is supported by Weedon (1987) who reflects that: "experience is prior to language but requires language in order to be communicated to other people" (p.85). For myself, one subjective example is sexism. As a girl, I had been privy to acts of sexism but I had not named them as such. When Jamie Blower told me that girls could not be astronauts at age 6, I was truly confused. Not only because I had labored over my art project that was assigned to give a visual representation of future career ambitions (I looked like a

damn fine astronaut, stick limbs and all), but because my favourite book at the time was *Girls Can be Anything* (Klein, 1973). I really believed that. I just thought Jamie Blower was wrong – so wrong I inked out his face in my grade one- class photo. Many years later, as an adolescent, I wrote a letter to the editor of my local newspaper the day after the Montreal Massacre deploring violence against women. Once it was published, I was cornered in the high school hall by my history teacher who told me that my letter simply incited hatred against males and that the Montreal Massacre was nothing more than an isolated, bizarre incident. He had a habit of spitting on students too close in his range, and I received the full wrath of his faulty dental work and rage. These examples reflect the sexist indoctrination that many of us experience, but at both points in my development, I did not have the words with which to articulate the dissonance they aroused in me. I struggled to come to terms with sexism in the absence of language that could be shared.

Likewise, the proclamation of a feminist identity is not a singular event, and through its articulation ultimately creates both resonance and dissonance. It must be noted, as well, that there is not a singular "truth" to feminist narratives, so my intention is not to place my consultants on a hierarchy of so called best feminisms. Yeatman (1994) supports the diversity of feminist consciousness, stating:

> The answer lies not in attempting to preempt the differentiation of expert and non-expert feminist theorizing by making all conform to the homogenizing dictates of the feminist community and it's inevitable, totalizing moral strictures. Instead, it lies in maintaining this differentiation while requiring both dialogue and accountability across it. Just what this might mean requires rather different

> models of political accountability, dialogue and democratic participation than those we inherit. (p.50)

Hence, while my consultants shared some common themes, they did not present a unitary, analogical version of feminist understanding. In fact, their feminist narratives are neither simulacra's of stage theories of feminist development (Ng, Dunne, & Cataldo, 1995) nor waves. As Newman pointed out, it can be charting one's own path in the absence of role models and in reaction to outdated modes of what it means to be "feminist". Yet, as Teya points out in the next paragraph, it can also be a social constructionist process of meaning making.

My consultants reflected that a feminist identity is akin to an evolution of self in context, as opposed to a fixed click. For example, Teya states:

> *I think a series of events, more like a progression for me [to feminism], I think about in terms of my adolescence and where I was living at the time, taking care of a lot of single mothers' children and most of the single moms were lesbians, and me at the time always thinking that feminism equaled being a lesbian or lesbianism equaled feminism. So, for me, it was this whole kind of notion of identity, ideas and views on things and views of family and family structure, and so I think it was a progression from my adolescence forward.*

Part of Teya's consciousness-raising occurred in another country that was fraught with oppressive political and social regimes[14]. In this respect, early childhood context did, indeed, have an epistemological and ontological impact. She comments that

> *I was raised to speak up and to stand up for what I believed in. The injustices of other people was not ok, regardless of what the actual issue was or the injustice. I have some responsibility to speak out. If I look back on that, I was really supported by my father as a young person. So I think its always been within me, like I don't think I can take it off or put it away or, its, its an awareness that once we have an awareness of something we can't go back, right?*

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[14] For the purposes of protecting Teya's identity, the name of the country cannot be included.

It is interesting to note that she describes such awareness as "within". To be a feminist, then, is to embody feminism and the critical social action it invokes. For Teya, feminist action and child and youth care work meet at the intersection of praxis. If disembodiment "becomes a way of existing in one's body in the mode of denial" (Butler, as quoted in Salih, 2004, p.28) then Teya is actively fighting this denial – denial of social oppression, denial of lived realities. Her early childhood context was one in which injustice was explicit, regimented, and enforced, so it comes as no surprise that awareness of social justice would come early, and over the course of thirty years become a way of being, or in theoretical terms, an ontology. hooks (1994) speaks to integrating "ways of knowing with habits of being"(p.43). However, if feminism is "inside", how does this account for social construction and maintenance of structural oppression "outside"? Again, we come full circle to the issue of binary conceptualization of identity, oppression and action. Elliot (1995) argues that "if we insist that all oppression is externally generated, then we are prevented from examining the internal psychical factors that contribute to it" (p.50). For my consultants, feminism was, in a sense, the cognitive and philosophical vehicle in which to examine these internal psychical factors. It is these questions, layered upon the consultants' narratives, that brings me back to the concept of how social structures and language also shape individual feminisms, as "social location systemically shapes and limits what we know, including tacit, experiential knowledge as well as explicit understanding, what we take knowledge to be as well as epistemic content" (Wylie, 2004, p.343). Teya sums this up by stating:

> *It's [feminism] integrated, but that's not even the right word, it's a part of who I am. I think feminism is like part of my blood or my flesh and how much I wish to turn on the political or the radical with that basis of feminism is how, what kind of*

> *clothes I wear, or something like that. I think it's just who I am, its part of who I am.*

Newman reflected on his own coming to feminism:

> *I really identified growing up with my mom, I'm sure somewhere she took courses on feminism or I'm sure I've seen the books around. Maybe, for all I know we had conversations. I really don't know. But one thing I do know is that I always stood out in my family because there was a lot of racism in my family, my dad severely, my mom even had some racist comments and stuff and northern [province] is full of racism, right? And I had friends that were First Nations and friends that were Black and East Indian, you name it, and I didn't understand, I was often very confused around racism and I always felt that I stood out, like, why? Why? I never actually assumed all those philosophies and ideas, the script and so I see somehow that there are these seeds within me that grew, and grew, and when I started to hear the words feminism and hear about the concept of power and patriarchy was much later, but I knew it, it was just almost like putting labels to the dynamics that I witnessed, you know what I mean? So, it wasn't until I think probably my child and youth care degree that I started to explore those ideas, and have labels for them, so that's WAY later, but I knew them, they weren't unfamiliar.*

His reflection on his mother as concurrently racist and feminist is an interesting tension. Does this create a dissonance in feminist identity? Certainly, many second wave feminisms were critiqued for their Euro-centric conceptions, and a coming to feminism often illuminates where gender is privileged over racialized, abilized and heterosexualized ways of being. My own continually evolving relationship with feminism, for example, has forced me to examine my own journey through transphobia. Being feminist and Queer does not mean I am not immune to dominant scripts that detail the status quo. Newman also spoke to "internalization", reflecting a sense of inner identity that plays out in his personal and professional life, commenting:

> *Also, feminism to me is about really exploring the scripts that I've internalized. I'm as oppressed, the oppressor is oppressed, I think its such a shame, huge loss, that men can't be a different way and if they do, they're called fags or pussies or wimps or women, used as a cut down, that's horrible, all these words right? Of not quite a man, and so these scripts that deny humanity, the human part, the potential, they deny potential.*

In a sense, his identification of being both the oppressed and the oppressor links the inside and outside dichotomy about where feminism and where oppression "exist". They are not positioned in binaries; rather, they work dialectically to inform actions.

Penelope reflected that her coming to feminism was *"not really much of a profound story, it just kinda gradually crept up on me that feminism was what I needed"* and also shares the evolutionary perspective saying: "*I think it's [feminism] just about how you choose to live your life, that you have opportunities, and that you can make your own decisions, you know, that you are no longer a child".* Early childhood relationships also influenced this consultant's coming to feminism, claiming her mother is "*a feminist, because of the way she lives her life, and the way that she raised her children".* Interestingly, Penelope later retracted this statement, telling me:

> *Well, when you say that mom lived her life as a feminist, I don't think she really did. I think maybe when she was younger, but you know, at the same time she taught those kinds of values [choice and equality] to her kids so that's part of it, too.*

Again, the focus is on actions informing identity. Penelope never said whether her mother called herself a feminist, but she believed that to a certain extent, her mother embodied a feminist perspective. This also brings us to another common theme in their coming to understand and embrace feminism – having mentors and teachers. As mentioned earlier, two consultants hold degrees in Child and Youth care at the post secondary level. Despite the time invested in the degree programs, there was some healthy cynicism about the instruction they received around feminist theory. When asked whether either course materials or personal exploration sparked his feminist evolvement, Newman says:

> *Well, very poorly [laughs] in terms of the CYC, I picked it up real easy [snaps fingers]. I didn't need to be converted into the thought, it just put words to what I understood so I was immediately dissatisfied with the level of discussion in child and youth care, immediately.*

Likewise, Teya reflected:

> *When I think about, from my own learning experience in the program, I mean, the ten minutes on feminism that I had in, I think in second year, was appalling, you know? But now, I know that for me, and then, I've taken that on as my own responsibility, its up to me to learn more and to be open to questioning.*

Her comment raises two points for me. The first is the question of whose responsibility it is to facilitate feminist pedagogy at the university. Do we assume that learning is a socially constructed and dyadic process that would, indeed, expect students to take responsibility for their learning deficits? The second point is which students would do this at the undergraduate level? Like all theories presented in the undergraduate CYC curriculum, the delivery of it often sets the context for how it is received, and potentially rejected or rejoiced. For myself, I do not reflect on my introduction to feminism as a positive learning experience. I did, however, have courses in Women's Studies that fed my feminist curiosity.

For Penelope, coming from an English Literature background, her experience also revolved around the tension of working with a male canon of literature. She comments:

> *I realized in school, too, I took English and having a profound lack of female authors and there were a few teachers who were trying to make up for the lack of it in the canon.*

Given the sparse female representation in psychological literature, and having been an English major at one point, her comment is not surprising. As well, coming from women studies, I could certainly relate to all three comments. How can we expect students to

examine gender and all other intersections of identity, when, as instructors, we cannot facilitate the discussion? Further, as Collins (1986) points out,

> For any profession, a value system functions as a guide. It introduces a perspective that affects the points of view assumed, the criteria by which goals are chosen, what facts are sought or found, and how such information is interpreted and understood. There is no such thing as a value-free professional practice, whether it be clinical intervention, political lobbying, research, or knowledge building. What we consider important to ask, how we visualize and interpret what we find, and what we do are all influenced by the value system in operation, whether or not this is explicitly acknowledged. (p.215)

This brings us to Teya's musing on CYC instructors:

> *I think some of the professors are quite intertwined with feminism and they don't separate the two while they're teaching. So I think we got that benefit from some of our professors, but it was never named and maybe that the struggle in terms of how can we define child and youth care. Is it different or is it intertwined*?

As is discussed in the resistance chapter, there is an aura, for some, of living in post-patriarchy, and this lends to a less explicit languaging of experience as feminist. But is it truly intertwined as she suggests or as McKenna (1992) reflects, "erasures" (p.126)? Part of the issue is also developmental in that many of the instructors, one assumes, have already gone through the upheavals of self- awareness and questioning. Basic constructs such as multiple selves versus singular self, for example, often send students into a period of questioning. One can imagine, then, learning that "no intervention is gender free" (Walters, Carter, Papp, & Silverstein, 1988, p. 29) would also result in some explicit reaction that must be skillfully facilitated. Such exploration needs guidance, and Newman reflected that

> *Our self is our vehicle of change in this work, and its hard work and I think it can be done at a much greater level. Much more, it has to be way more caring, have to be more involved and [kinda ironic for our title, eh?]. Yeah, totally, its big work and I think we have to chart our own path to it as well, Like kinda going to delve into myself, its scary. Some people can get really lost in that, like its really exstistential in a lot of ways, and, well, I did, I saw people who really came out not so well after exploring. They got really unsure of things, so, you know, it needs guidance, it needs people to help facilitate the process, very strongly, it needs to embody its own belief system so that it can be about empowerment and, we are experts of our process and what not. That could be exemplified, you know, praxis, putting it into action that could be exemplified far greater in the school process.*

Given that the consultants who attended the CYC degree program did not gain the feminist mentorship within the school, they sought out philosophic mentors of their own, especially in regard to understanding privilege, oppression, and language. For example, Teya commented

> *You know, I think it is [awareness of privilege and oppression] because I've had so many different powerful people in my life teach me things, and show me things, it's a progression like I've said, like something in progress or a process that, now its an awareness I have.*

And that such awareness

> *has come with my learning as a feminist and learning from people who in my life, who I deem to be these wonderful feminist teachers of mine.*

For Newman, awareness was not limited to cognitive processing prompted by mentors, but is a

> *Metaphysical process, I think situations of being in certain spiritual disciplines like meditation retreats, Buddhism experiences, experiences fasting, meditating, like I've had a lot of good teachers in my life, First Nations teachers in Northern [province], teachers in India kind of facilitated some experiences like helped me not get bogged down into the particular, like this is the particular all around me, this painting, this side here, the wall of this house, this chair I'm sitting on is like the particular and there's something transcendent to it all, like the belief of separation is a particular, these ideas, these words I'm using but moving beyond to get to the miraculous of it, to the unexplainableness of it- I find really fuels me up.*

Much like my understanding of a host of issues through the vehicle of feminism, which will be fleshed out more thoroughly in the evolution chapter, Newman seems, to me, to have come to feminism through various spiritual teachings. The reader is reminded that he did comment that he, as a male, was coming to a feminist identity in an opposite direction. Throughout our conversations, Newman often refers to the connectedness of all things, and as will be discussed in the performance chapter, moves his coming to feminism as not solely focused on sexist oppression, or in his own words: "*the term feminism is a cross section of a structure that is much bigger than that*".

Just as feminism is a cross section of a larger "*dynamic or energy*" (Newman), mentorship and leadership also surpasses parents, elders, and socially identified leaders. Penelope, for example, states:

> *My friends who were strong feminists, I think they spoke loudly, but didn't always necessarily act so loudly. That's why being in touch with people, especially at the [sexual health] clinic, to bring back to that kind of issue, it sort of brings me back in touch with like what others have going on in their lives which is probably, in a lot of cases, different from mine.*

Penelope raises an interesting point in how some speak loudly and others act louder. It reminds me that I too, at the beginning of this inquiry, spoke louder than I acted. As I try to move in the world as a feminist teacher, both in the traditional sense in the academy and in the informal sense, such as with my niece, I carry this distinction with me. It is not only the mentorship that my consultants have received, but they are in fact, also mentors in this quagmire of human interaction. Once they came to feminism, they did not stop in their feminist actions and philosophies, on the contrary, they multiplied in their complexity. For example, naming their feminist identity/ies did not stop them from continuing to learn about what it might mean to be a feminist. In fact, each consultant

also spoke to the process of becoming a feminist mentor. For the purposes of this inquiry, mentoring was not explored in enough detail to discuss, but suffice to say the lessons all four of us learned from teachers, whether they be feminist, spiritual or both, impact our practice today, and how we interact with gender. This brings us to the next chapter, that of gender and boys in tutus.

Chapter Six

Boys in Tutus

There is an etiquette of dreams,
you just don't walk into another person's head
without knocking
(Kulyk Keefer, 1989, p.279)

Originally, this inquiry was intended to have only female identified consultants. My experience has been that most of my feminist work has been done with other women and much like Gergen (2001) "the topics, the aims, and the primary participants in my research and my imagined audience are women, as well as all who call themselves feminists or friendly bystanders" (p.6). Had it not been for a dream visit, I would have most likely pursued this very narrow trajectory. I was visited in a dream by Captain Snowdon who is a self described as "a genderqueer, activist and outreach worker" (2001, p.40). Captain is also a poet, and writes:

She said that he nothing of the taboos beyond the he
said-she-said of the wrong body politics, gender dysphoria of
the womb-less state.

They didn't know what to call me
and I wasn't
I wasn't
I wasn't
Gonna help them.

Are you a boy? *no*
Are you a girl? *no*
But thanks for askin'

& it's a crime not to check
a box on your census form you
know jail for not buying into the binary bullshit
convinces me they all have a police tape worm eating away

at their intestinal fortitude
doing acrobatics around sleep filled days building a shrine to ambivalence
leaves me with nothing by my cigarette faith worshipping at
the familiar church of addiction knees sore services
shrinking but funerals multiplying

It is all a bit queer in the broadest sense of the word then
Again maybe it's just me.
(City Hall Slam, p.17).

In my dream, other local Queer activists join him, and together we are seated around a round table. Much like a panel interview, the activists consisted of a semi moon seating arrangement, whereas I sat opposite, facing them. Captain is the only one to speak in the dream, and he simply says to me: "You have to stop thinking in binary". As is my habit with abstract streams of potential profundity, I awoke and wrote the dream down. Musing on the meaning the next day, I came to the conclusion that limiting my inquiry to self identified women essentially contributed to only half a revolution. Once visited by Captain, and by visiting the writings of Judith Butler , it became clearer to me that the gender script taken up by participants could only inform their feminist view, after all, a "feminist" does not exist outside the intersections of her/his gender, cultural legacy or sexual orientation. At the same time, these aforementioned categories rarely exist as smooth entries and exits of personality; they are socially and dialectically constructed. As Butler (quoted in Salih, 2004) comments, "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (p.121). This inquiry falls under a rallying call of feminism, but how consultants came to see such a category as liberatory is inevitably dialectically informed by how they interpret gender – either their own or that of their clients.

Newman shared a story with me that I will quote fully that illustrates how social interaction informs personal awareness:

> *Here's a story. I was about second year working at [agency] and I saw this workshop on feminism in practice and praxis and I was very excited, oh this looks like a really good workshop and look who's presenting! So, I went to Vancouver, I could take the bus there and I got paid by work because I was totally broke, and I was so excited and I was a little bit late cause I had missed the bus. And I go marching into the big conference and looking around, geesh, there's no chairs. Oh! There's one right at the front and the seat is right below the podium [laughter] and I am walking and I'm looking around and there's no men here, I'm the only one, I am the only man here. And I am walking to the front and everything went really silent and the speaker was kind of slowing down and everyone started watching me and I went down to the front and holy shit! This is a feminist conference and what have I done? I've just sort invited myself in and is this ok?*

Throughout our conversations, Newman consistently linked his identified gender, male, with his relationship with feminism and other feminists. As Collins (1992), a male CYC practitioner, reflected: "I continue to struggle with the question, can a man be a feminist? Is it possible for men to truly understand the inequality, discrimination and violence that women have to confront? Can a man think and behave like a feminist?" (p.72). The binary attributed to gender has some of its legacy in the second wave feminist movement, when Solanas (1996) unapologetically stated in her manifesto: "every man, deep down, knows he's a worthless piece of shit" (p.5). Women were not spared, either, however, and allegiance to their own gender, first and foremost, was considered desirable: "the non-separatist woman who is not included in the common conception of the feminist solution may be viewed as a co-opted part of the problem" (Johnston, 2000, p.356). Given these statements, we can imagine what roles men played (or did not) in the utopist vision of feminist emancipation. I do not dispute the contributions of lesbian separatists;

in fact, I believe collectively, various second wave ideologies challenge contemporary thinking of what constitutes "radical" or even "progressive". As one consultant reflected:

> *That's how I think feminism is. I look at it historically, you know? Through the 60's and 70's and the liberation of women, it needed to have a very concrete, very succinct, very different identity. Now we're evolving, it's an evolving process for me, but it needed to have something very defined and very concrete.*

Parallel to the evolution of feminist thinking is my own conceptualization of male participation in the movement. In all honesty, despite asserting that I believed men to be valuable comrades, I still held a suspicious nature about their involvement in feminist programs or projects. As a socially gendered and Queer woman, my suspicions were based on very patriarchal interactions from my past. For example, I have had my plethora of flirtation delivered by men that started with the line: "I'm really just a lesbian trapped in a man's body"[15]. My own orientation to males as consultants, then, was clearly informed by personal experience, and like Collins (1992) agreed: "although I have seem some hopeful progress with feminism impacting women, I am less optimistic with males" (p.73). It was through my conversations with Newman that my own gendered bias began to come to the surface and, ultimately changed for the better. This is part of the "potential chaos" that Gergen (2001, p. 104) characterizes as feminist inquiry, and such chaos is also supported by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who state: "sometimes, this means that our own unnamed, perhaps secret stories come to light as much as do those of our participants. This confronting of ourselves in our narrative past makes us vulnerable as inquirers because it makes secret stories public…it is impossible (or if not impossible then deliberately self-deceptive) as researcher to stay silent or present a kind

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[15] This is not to discount transgendered experience(s), but rather to suggest that "trans" language is appropriated at least, and exploited at worst, thus rendering those who really are lesbian identified in a biologically male body invisible once again at the hands of heterosexism.

of perfect, idealized, inquiring, moralizing self" (pp. 61-62). My "secret story" is thus made public. What I learned through having a male consultant was my own sexist and gendered assumptions. His transparent comments about his role in the feminist milieu serves to problematize gender but not eradicate the male gender from the feminist struggle. Newman speaks to filtering feminism through the male gender, stating:

> *Inevitably, as an identified male, I'm coming into feminism in almost the opposite direction. As an identified male who's born into the societal scripts that oppress and take away power, what I do is I try to reduce my impact of power. I know the power I have as a counsellor. I know my privileges- I name them when it is important to name them. I can't take away being male and white and all that stuff that comes with it, but I can name it when something [has] happened. Let's say I'm in a dynamic where somebody turns to me instead of my female colleague, I can name that. I can speak to it and try to deflate the power that way – teaching moments-not making people feel bad for it but just bringing it to light.*

Just as hooks (1994) argues that whiteness should be explored as social location and social privilege to inform anti-racist work, so too, must men grapple with the concepts of "male" and "maleness" on social, political, cultural and personal levels. In the 1990's we saw the beginning of heterosexual male writing focused on liberating men from the narrow, but powerful, avenues of identity (Bly, 1990 being known to many), as well as some writing exploring the identity narratives of gay men (Kopenen, 1993; Mendelsohn, 1999; Loughery, 1998, to name a few). There is, to me, a sense of hope in the enterprise of deconstructing maleness. Newman initiated his own exploration around this, telling me:

> *Here's also a place that I really think I found a lot of my ideas. I belonged to a men's group. Me and a colleague at work, we decided that we wanted to start a men's group and we really didn't have a clue what it was but we just wanted to gather as people who identify as men to explore what the heck it is, cause part of the repercussions, liberation that feminism has offered males and females is the question: what the hell is gender? What am I now? What is my role? And where do I go with it? And men are hearing that, men are learning. Obviously, in the 60's and onwards, feminist took a wooo [employs hands to indicate a sharp,*

> *vertical curve] where women basically evolved and men are coming along slowly, right? [laughter] When the feminists who marched in the 60's and took on the establishment helped liberate everyone, the world is a better place for that work and a lot of that work was women questioning: what am I? Am I a woman anymore? What is that? That intense kind of self-questioning. I feel quite fortunate for this place where I can think about being part of a men's group, so we formed this teeny men's group.*

Gendered constructs are not only apparent to my male identified consultant, so too did my female identified consultants reflect on their stereotypical "sensitivity" due to their gender:

> *Q: Are you ever labeled as too sensitive?*
>
> *Teya: Absolutely. Then I process that, and I go ok, is this a gendered slant that's coming at me? Is this a slant because I am a feminist? Is this a slant because I am a lesbian and therefore expected to be more political? There's so many layers to it.*

Her ability to put this in a critical context is reflected in her next statement:

> *I had this one guy..."Oh well, you just love all the people who can't speak for themselves, all the isms, all the this, all the that and you just love them and as long as someone has an issue, you're supporting them...you can't be so sensitive about this stuff because its going to happen all the time" and I said, yeah, and we have to be sensitive about this stuff and if I'm not sensitive I'm not paying attention. So, I reframe it [laughter].*

Likewise, Penelope recalled how her sister

> *Would roll her eyes when I brought up recycling or something like that [laughter], whatever, the [Iraq] war and all that stuff, it's all related.*

I, too, although confident in my feminist orientation, feel at times that colleagues and students see me as waiting to pounce on an issue and deconstruct it to nothingness, offering no phoenix in return. In my desire to illuminate sexism I am accused of being politically correct, or like Penelope and Teya, too sensitive. This is especially evident with students who question the relevancy of "p.c. language" of the institution (university) and their reactions from clients when using such dialect. Understanding oppressive

language, however, is part of the process of my consultants and my own awareness. Teya comments:

> *I was really quick to be more politically correct or say the right things or correct people when they were saying the word retarded or using words that I felt were really offensive. I've kind of stepped back from that because it's more about asking more questions, and opening up a dialogue.*

This consultant reflected that couching language under "right" or "politically correct" actually undermined her current feminist intentions of engaging in dialogue. I, too, have struggled with using the "right" language for gender, yet, in doing so, have rendered my audience (whether students, clients or family) defensive and reactive. The same struggle remains as I work in the realm of research representation. So scared are we to offend (Hoskins & Stoltz, 2005) that we take up stock language without critically examining the intentions, or ramifications of, using a politically correct dialogue. For example, Newman reflects on such limitations:

> *I don't get the whole politically correct thing. It confuses me, as I see the terms used to oppress more, actually. People pull it out to censor people, its used against people, and its used in a negative way: "I'm not trying to be PC but blah, blah, blah" or "the PC thing is to say..." And that doesn't fit. I'd rather have a dialogue around how somebody uses a word. For example, I have a youth that I work with who says retarded all the time, and asked: what do you mean by that? "It's bad" and "I don't like it". Ok, I understand that when you are retarded, you're somebody with a disability, and? An? old term, and then we'd explore it. It's not about trying to find another word that won't offend me. It's about getting down to the root of what you're actually saying.*

I am often pushing comfort zones in all contexts that I operate in regarding gendered language (and opening myself up to challenge, as well). I concur with Braidotti (1991) who calls upon us to "reinvest language with a revolutionary potential for social and political changes" (p. 239).

An important criticism in feminist literature and gendered performances is that of the victim stance (Dineen, 1996; Paeti, 2001). This is often leveled against feminist analysis because in talking about how gender is oppressive, undoubtedly people tell stories that are traumatic, heartbreaking and violent. For myself, there is a fine line between honouring the survival of women and others who have experienced discriminatory violence and moving beyond the position that holds women hostage in their victimhood. If we are to follow Captain's advice and stop thinking in binary, then this requires us to also move from the dichotomy of victim/survivor. Penelope illustrates this complexity:

> *That's something I struggle with, I think I do take responsibility for my own choices and I don't feel like a victim, but, then, I guess everyone has those moments. You have to be given or taught how to make choices, too, and not everybody has the tools to make the right decisions or has multiple choices in front of them.*

hooks (2000) also speaks to this, stating: "when women internalized the idea that describing their own woe was synonymous with developing a critical political consciousness, the progress of the feminist movement was stalled" (p.26). While I agree that only so much emancipatory theory can develop from the perspective of the "victim", I remain steadfast in my conviction that women do experience oppression, as do men who speak out against such oppression. Unlike Boyd (2004), I see victim narratives as less as a conspiracy of so-called extreme feminists and more along the lines of O'Brien Hallstein's (1999) constrained choice. As my consultants have reflected, our gendered social scripts are narrow. And as my consultants have also demonstrated, they do not take up a perspective of victim, but rather are active in the deconstruction of gender and its limitations.

Translation of Gender to Practice

Given my consultants' relationship to gender, gender scripts and gendered awareness, how does this translate to performing their identities in the context of work with children, youth and families? One common theme was that of choice. Although my own understanding of the word choice revolves around my involvement with the pro-choice movement and pro-choice work in the realm of counseling, advocacy and activism, I was not anticipating choice to be a major theme outside the abortion discourse. For Penelope, offering choice to the children she cares for is informed by her own childhood understanding of gender but also is presented in a manner that respects stereotypical choice as well. For example, she comments:

> *[Girl she takes care of] wants to wear her hair long and down all the time and she's never said that she was afraid somebody would mistake her for a boy, but I remember being a kid and thinking that would be a pretty devastating thing. I wasn't mistaken for a boy, I had really long hair.*

This comment made me reflect on my own experience as a caregiver to two young children, over eleven years ago. Hannah was two and half years old and literally divided the world's inhabitants into those who had vaginas and those who had penises. Developmentally precocious, she would simply ask people what they "had" and made her assessment accordingly. Learning to divide the world on genitalia was her entry into binary thinking, despite the intention of her parents' empowering her with the use of anatomically correct language[16]. Despite this categorization, she was equally open to the possibility of growing up to be a boy, or a dolphin for that matter. Despite the

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[16] I, too, had the experience of being taught anatomically correct language. Interestingly enough, at age 5, I was punished for using it by a day care provider as I passionately argued with a young boy who insisted on calling his penis a "wee-wee". Sometimes, protective factors and pro-active parenting result in some messy social negotiation.

dichotomous classification of the world, she was also open to the imagination that appears to delude adults. Eagleton (as quoted in hooks, 1994) states:

> Children make the best theorists, since they have not been educated into accepting our routine social practices as 'natural', and so insist on posing to those practices the more embarrassingly general and fundamental questions, regarding them with a wondering engagement which we adults have long forgotten. Since they do not yet grasp our social practices as inevitable, they do not see why we might not do things differently. (p.59).

In the case of Penelope, she has done things differently, despite her fear that the father in the family she works with would disagree on playing with gendered imagination. For example, she told me that despite her own fear of being mistaken as a boy when she was a little girl that:

> *I remember one time we [the kids and she] we were getting dressed up and he really wanted to wear [his sister's] tutus and stuff and I said, go on, you'll look fabulous and they danced around and they were so cute.*

It is difficult to communicate to the reader how beautiful this quote is to me. It grasped my heart and pumped it as if to say: critical feminist theory is one thing, but letting children be free in the moment is another. Boys in tutus may not seem a revolutionary action to some, but this presents a powerful metaphor of how we just let children "be" when we do not enforce gendered rules and consequences. I recall working with a boy of seven and discussing his ambitions to be an artist. When talking with this boy's father, however, it became clear that such an ambition was "for hippies and fags". Clearly, the idea of choice was gendered and sexualized in this context. But what is really choice in

the context of my consultants and the children, youth and families they work with? I asked Penelope this and she replied that:

> *Choice is about where you want to live and what you want to do for a living and how you want to live, how you want to spend your time. And those kinds of choices are limited by what you know and what you're able to access, money-wise or if you are permitted to something, if something is more accessible to you or if you're shut off from it.*

Clearly, children in a North American context do not always have the above choices. In fact, it is often CYC practitioners or social workers that are the people and/or agencies making these decisions for them. Teya also supports the notion of choice, stating:

> *As a feminist, its about giving kids choice and its about providing as many different learning experiences as possible. It is about teaching them responsibility therefore they become more socially responsible. If we want to raise kids who are socially responsible, it's about giving them responsibility, too, right?*

But what is choice? By reflecting on choice as a "tool" that we offer children, it infers that we have unlimited choices to offer, as men, women and otherwise identified, and as child and youth care workers. Returning to O'Brien Hallstein's (1999) concept of constrained choice, I am wary of being able to offer children, youth and families a so-called true or objective choice. This remains a tension practicing from a feminist perspective because our roles as CYC practitioners is to facilitate choices, but this is more often done within hetero-patriachal assumptions. According to Currie (1999), "unless we can understand women's desires and acts of resistance in relation to their consciousness of oppression, 'agency' remains unconnected from feminism as a social form of women's power"(p.311). Likewise, choice remains also rooted in the consciousness of liberty – what constitutes liberatory choice? For Penelope, the idea of choice is also fraught with the idea of imposition, stating:

> *I go back and forth between thinking that maybe I am trying to impose something on her [girl in her care], and maybe that's something she does need to be taught, to be stronger.*

I am reminded of the statement oft expressed in regard to Queer people: "I don't mind, but why do they have to flaunt it?" Likewise, it is "ok" to a feminist, just don't impose it. It is interesting to note, however, that gender as a social condition and its auxiliary expectations are imposed on all of us. Bornstein (as quoted in Bell, 1993), for example, speaks of gender as a cult. And because gender is all around us, how we come to understanding it and resisting it is of great interest, which moves us to how my consultants came to perform a feminist identity.

Chapter Seven

Performing Feminism

My aunts washed dishes while the uncles
squirted each other on the lawn with
garden hoses. Why are we in here,
I said, and they are out there.
That's the way it is,
said Aunt Hetty, the shriveled-up one.

I have the rages that small animals have,
being small, being animal.
Written on me was a message,
'At Your Service' like a book of
paper matches. One by one we were
taken out and struck.
We come bearing supper,
our heads on fire.
(Jiles, 1982, p. 403)

A common question that was directed at me from colleagues, family and friends through the process of this inquiry was how I defined feminism, as though I could offer a neatly packaged and unproblematic treatise. Much like my consultant Teya, *"I find it really hard to pinpoint what feminism is to me even, so I ask myself that question a lot, like well, how am I being a feminist in my work?"* Her self-reflective "how I am being a feminist" statement offers a wider angle with which to view feminism than asking, for example, "what is feminist about my work according to a standard definition"? This chapter, therefore, is neither a study on the history of feminism in CYC, nor an explanation of the vast categories of feminist belief (for a good overview of feminist political streams, the reader is directed to Bryson, 1992) and does not offer any clear- cut definitions. Rather, I focus on the performative aspects described to me by consultants

when explicating the meaning they make of feminism. Since the four of us operate in different contexts, this performance, at times, may appear inconsistent to a singular feminist philosophy. This is not without its criticism, such from hooks (2000) who believed that we do, in fact, need a unifying definition of feminism if we are to "construct theory or engage in overall meaningful praxis" (p.18). I assert, however, that if we are ever to come to a collective interpretation of feminist child and youth care practice, then we first need to begin talking about what our experiences are of being feminist. I also believe, counter to hooks, that spending our energy on consensus, as opposed to focusing our energy on "a diversity of tactics"[17] (Michael Burnett, personal communication, November 13, 2004), dilutes our purpose, creating an erasure of difference and the illusion of hegemonic identities. This is echoed by Teya who reflected:

> *I'm trying to move in a way where I understand that everyone is very unique and individual and so I think that's still progressing for me. When I come back to what feminism looks like, or what is being a feminist? So, I'm moving away from, I think, what is safe to know and more being open to whatever comes.*

Her emphasis on "what feminism looks like" and "being" are central to my argument. Just as Dr.Gweneth Doane challenged me (personal communication, August 2002) about my own performance of feminism, I have been likewise challenged by consultants to articulate what exactly "being" a feminist means to me. As I moved though this inquiry, I began to see how meaning and performance were linked in a more intimate manner than I originally had conceptualized. I once again heard Captain's words: "you need to stop thinking in binary" and how these words could be extended to other areas outside of gender. How do I perform feminism in my family, work/academic and social networks? Feminism being an "identity" infers a singular and static self, whereas feminist

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[17] I am well aware that this comment smacks of military connotation, but as it is direct communication, wished to include it.

performance infers multiple sets and stages. It is not so much a persona of professional and personal being, but rather a *performa* - "The Latin origins of the word "self" or "person" invokes the ancient *persona*, which is a combination of *per* (for) and *sonare* ("sounding"). Besides being the "masks" that hide our true identities from our assumed roles, our *personae* thereby become the instruments of our voice—the means through which we make sound. " (Mahoney, 2003, p. 90). Our performas are the means in which we perform our feminist selves. Or, more disturbing to me, how did I *not* take up the challenge of being my feminist self in the aforementioned categories?

Case and Stevens Abbitt (2004) reflect:

> The field of performance stretches from medium to medium-plays, dance, concerts, installations, improvised events, club and cabaret performances- as well as throughout a variety of social codes, rituals, and quotidian interactions. Feminism and performance theory share a focus on endangered and engendered live bodies. Both concern complex and highly contested discourses with immediate relevance to current issues of technology, politics, media, and the production of meaning. (p.925).

Although consultants have previously described feminism as embodied, there are also performances of feminism in their place(s) of employment, in their parenting, in their community, and in their social interactions. Penelope, for example, comments:

> *"Do," as a feminist? Ok, well it has more to do with just feminism but as the whole kind of person that I want to be and that involves lots of other things, like being part of my community. I suppose it makes me more active in advocating for things I believe is not happening that I think should be happening in terms of the government.*

For Newman, his performance of his feminism was largely influenced by his parenting, stating:

> *As born into a male body on this planet, my responsibility is not to pass that on to a male child, to role model and to be gentle and caring and loving and emotionally aware and intelligent, with my emotions and not to relay a script of violence and control and all that stuff that is done over me, to me in my upbringing.*

His ability to "break away" from his own upbringing supports the notion that one can critically view a social location, but not be held hostage to it. Although Gergen 2001) asks the question: "aren't we all held hostage to social convention", clearly, we are not all hostages to history. As hooks (1994) argues, "no matter what one's class, race, gender, or social standing…without the capacity to think critically about our selves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow" (p.202). CYC programs do, in fact, encourage self -reflection as a key means of understanding our position in the professional world. I have been witness to some major communication and self-in-relationship overhauls, both as a student and an instructor, just as I have been witness and sometimes facilitator of ethically questionable means of achieving this self- awareness. For example, knowing one's role in one's family of origin is no doubt helpful in understanding one's reactions to other family systems in the realm of clinical practice. Self - awareness, however does not necessarily translate to creative, critical, or active means of engagement, such as performa.

All of my consultants expressed a creative means of performance. By this, I mean that they encouraged the children, youth and families they worked with to express themselves across the spectrum. This means that progress for a client or her/his family was not always measured in terms of the status quo. It could mean youth participating in

a protest, or a client showing up to a public meeting. So, whether that is social activism, as noted previously with Newman, or breaking down gender roles, as noted with Penelope, there appeared to be an involvement of children, youth and families on an action orientated, as opposed to cerebral, level. Yes, there is the incubation, deliberation and conversation on a level that does not necessarily strike most readers as radical. At the same time, there is intentional action that all consultants described. This is further exemplified by Teya, who reflected on the performative rhythm of feminism:

> *Then I can go into the radical, right? If we want to talk about protests and writing letters and being an active, political member of society or there's more gentler approaches when I think about going into a case meeting or a case conference and making a comment or, being political by bringing a client or an individual or a family that I'm working with to a meeting that [they were] not invited to. That's political, or radical for me.*

Performing feminism is not always "out there" on the Legislative lawn, swallowing fire with the Lesbian Avengers, but in everyday professional and personal action. At times however, the personal and professional overlap. Teya does acknowledge that:

> *For me, I firmly believe in speaking my truth. And that's a personal opinion, it's coming from a personal place for me more than it is professional at times. Professionally, I have to hold my truth back and, its about being intentional in where I speak my truth as a professional, because sometimes that can be different from the system I am working within. And also in the best interest of the people I work with, I think that sometimes if I'm truthful at the same time, then that might be detrimental to their perspective because it's not about me at that point, it's about them.*

At times, this performance is strategic. Teya states:

> *I have to practice at times strategically as a feminist because there are a lot of old school beliefs out there and in the field of child and youth care or generally speaking working with families or you know child and youth work or social work, just the whole field, in general, I... there is still some very, very imbalanced patriarchal views on how we practice with families and I think child and youth care, I'm very proud to be from the child and youth care perspective and from the school of child and youth care because we're a newer, a newer genre of*

> *professionals out there and we were provided with a lot more tools, I think than some people in the other helping professions.*

Her comment strikes me on two levels. The first is the idea of practicing strategically as a feminist given particular contexts. Many child and youth care workers I have spoken with informally at conferences, in "the school"[18] and elsewhere echo the need to work strategically as CYC practitioners. Parallel to feminists, CYC practitioners often perceive themselves alone in their perspective, from what I have been told and experienced, and hence must assert their views and performances in a manner that is, essentially, strategic. The second level is her belief that CYC is a newer, and hence, more evolved profession. This is problematic for myself viewing the discipline from a different location, such as graduate school and my concern is that such an assumption blocks critical reflection of the field as a whole, not just from a feminist lens.

Penelope, my participant who had not pursued formal child and youth care education, also spoke to strategic employment of feminism, stating:

> *It depends on who I'm with as well, not that I'm a different person, but a few weeks ago, I was at a friends place making brunch and there was a guy that I have never met before and we were just sort of lounging around and my other friends were cooking and I was reading Bust [magazine] and do you know that magazine? Its so great and I was just getting all irate because I was reading about all the changes in accessibility to birth control down in the States, and you know, 'listen to this everyone' and 'listen to this' and I think he was slightly alienated [laughter] but I didn't care. I think in other situations I am probably more so among soft spoken women, I tend to be more gentle about things with them, I don't want to be pushy, I'm not pushy, I don't think! [laughter]*

Knowing this woman in triple contexts, that of research consultant, co-student and co-worker, our shared laughter was, for me, part of my naming her "the whispering feminist" due to some intensive effort to transcribe her soft-spoken narrative (often

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[18] Meaning the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria.

interrupted by the ear splitting coffee mugs hitting the table by the tape recorder) and due to her sharp wit, well delivered critique of women's rights and environmentally sound perspective. As Newman reflected: *"sometimes the more silent and quieter people are the ones who are really making a big impact, right?"* Her soft-spoken nature is also at times, complimentary, to her work as a volunteer counsellor and early childhood worker, but belies the dominant stereotype of the loud and angry feminist.

The second level to strategic practice is that my male identified consultant did not speak to strategy in the same manner as my female identified consultants, and I am curious to know how gender plays out in this. He is very aware of his privileged position in society, and comments several times over the course of our two dialogues about how that guides his practice in terms of challenging such privilege. Perhaps he does not have to practice strategically because as a male, he is afforded such strategy and he reflects:

> *What I practice in terms of being a feminist is I'm really aware of privilege, where privilege has just been handed to me on a platter, due to my gender and color, like I see it now, like I witness it.*

Active Thinking

Part and parcel of contemporary interpretations of feminism is that feminists are women and men who gripe, complain, and otherwise make the lives of their clients, co-workers, and families miserable through insatiable analysis and problematizing. Although partly a phenomena that Faludi (1991) describes as backlash, it is also a fatigue in feminist activity. As time progresses, I meet fewer people who take up the qualifier of feminist, but yet, more people are picking up the discourse of global and human rights. In my own experience, this has partially been due to the sheer stamina involved in taking a gender aware stance, this is, indeed an outlet of substantial energy. Partially this is

attributed to the risk practitioners take in employing a feminist perspective in their interactions given their social location. For example, Felicio and Pieniadz (1999) speak to this, stating:

> Perception of safety and threat also hold particular significance for those whose power is compromised within the academic arena. For instance, faculty and students of color (hooks, 1989), lesbians and gay men (Rothblum, 1995) and faculty and students who have experienced alienation due to class background (Gardiner, 1993) may be less likely to raise concerns about ethical dilemmas (be they related or not to race, sexual identity or class) because of the increased attention to stereotypes that often results from being the 'squeaky wheel' (e.g. the 'angry lesbian'). (p. 56)

Certainly, it is a fine balance struck in the moment when one chooses to be a catalyst of dialogue, change or action but also wishes to be heard not just as a feminist, a woman, and lesbian and so forth. As Newman articulates:

> *Action's a scary, scary place. If I'm addressing somebody who's done something racist or sexist it's scary, you know? It's a hard place, and its one of my hardest things to do cause you have to do it in a way that doesn't defeat the purpose, doesn't embitter the person, make them feel stronger and more entrenched in that view because that's what happens when people feel ashamed, right? You can't come with shame, cause that's more of the same thing, you know, it's all linked, in my mind, it's the same kind of energy.*

I concur with him in that despite our formal training in diversity or critical theories - which are thin at best at the undergraduate level with a few exceptions - the move from internal thinking to active and articulated thinking is a risk. I have experienced this when I have held various positions of power, such as instructor and counsellor, and I have also experienced this in positions where I perceived myself to have little power, as a student

and client. The legacy of the second wave feminist movement has taught us to identify when abuses of power and discrimination occur, but my question is: have we learned how to act on such transgressions in progressive ways? A good example of this dilemma is to examine the narrative produced by Teya:

> *I question everything all the time and I've actually had to pull back on doing that because sometimes it impedes my decision- making abilities. So, I actually can never make a decision cause I'm constantly questioning that decision? Or questioning the fact that I'm questioning the decision, but, I think that's essential and I think like I was saying earlier about the progression or the process of me being a feminist, I think, always questioning things, and always being open to learning about what people have to say, like not making assumptions and its hard not to assume at times, right?*

Not to discount her critical awareness, but Lather (1991) also reminds us that "in an era of rampant reflexivity, just getting on with it may be the most radical action one can make" (p.20), which brings out the next performative aspect of feminism: praxis.

Praxis

Several feminist, poststructuralists, and socially invested scholars have discussed praxis as a means of working, researching, and teaching (Butler, as quoted in Salih, 2004; Chinn, 1995; hooks, 1994, 2000; Lather, 1991; and Madigan & Law, 1998). Praxis is a term that, in my opinion, does not get enough attention in the CYC realm. Specifically, Chinn (1995) defines praxis as "*values made visible through deliberate action*" (p.3, emphasis in original). Praxis is different from practice in that there is a critical edge to our engagement with clients, students, and colleagues. Practice conjures up images of sitting at a piano running the scales in repetition, as opposed to questioning who developed the scales, what purpose they serve and how to improvise with them. Praxis is *not*, as I learned through conversing with Dr. Gweneth Doane, mere verbal descriptors of whom one wants to be. That was perhaps the hardest learning for myself through this

inquiry – I wasn't engaging as fully in praxis as I wanted to, or had the potential to do. Mahoney (1991), for example, stated: "What we do is necessarily a reflection of what we value; and the latter, in turn, is often a humbling lesson in self-awareness." (p. 5). Yes, I had been "practicing" CYC work, engaging in radical and creative praxis with the Mayhem Collective, but somehow kept the two separate. For myself, praxis is the ability to be all of my self, my selves, in as many contexts as possible. For my consultants, praxis was demonstrated through their ability to link belief to action. For example, Newman reflected:

> *Trying to have integrity for my beliefs to translate into action, I'm just embodying through my actions to translate into action. I'm embodying through my actions the break down [of] power structures or addressing them, naming them at least, addressing them in other kind of capacities and respecting, having the youth as a center of the process, and all the different bodies that come out of this particular themes. It also guides me that I know that there has to be structural change, that you know it, there has to be to our work, if you're not doing lots of changes, and you and I have had conversations, we could just be condoning and accepting the conditions that have created problems in the first place, so, it's a way of being for me, way of walking, attempting more awareness of the consequences of my actions, my footprint, on people, my fingerprints on people, and my footprints on the earth.*

For Penelope,

> *Especially young teenagers, to teach them feminism and have them not to be afraid of it as something that will rob them of their sexuality and I think that's a lot of what they're afraid of. That it's going to, you know, rob them of the femininity as well, or something, they shouldn't. Also it absolves them of responsibility, too, you know, that they're not victims, too, that they don't have to be.*

There is also tension, however, in applying praxis to one's own private life. Penelope, who aspired to further her education in peace studies as it relates to children's and women's rights, commented:

> *It's a huge dilemma that I have, too, there's this whole part of me that is expecting I'll have children and all that kind of thing, and I think I probably will, but there's a whole other part of me that thinks having children is socially irresponsible [laughter] and I mean, I think, I'm all for, everything should be done to make the lives of children who are living as good as it can be but to bring more into the world just seems not so smart, but at the same time like oh, and that feeling is kinda growing, no its about the same, it fluctuates though, sometimes it gets really weak [laughter] and then its like, you know, you see a baby and other times, like I love having the freedom of not having kids.*

This reminds us that praxis is not "pure" or "singular" performance of oneself. At times, enacting one's beliefs presents a contested and contradictory stage. An extreme example would be the Log Cabin in the USA, which consists of queer republicans, or myself working for the police given my inherent distrust of them. Praxis is not, in my opinion, about determining what constitutes the better way to accomplish social change (for example, inside the system or outside the system) but rather the intentional consciousness involved in that change struggle.

Is Praxis Political?

To perform praxis, one is inherently political. The word political, much like feminism, often has numerous connotations (say, for the Log Cabin member versus an anarchist). An example that comes to mind is a conversation I held with Dr. Marie Hoskins regarding the role of politics in child and youth care. The example of what praxical work may look like is captured between a conversation with a solo mother at the sexual health clinic and myself. She was severed suddenly from social assistance and trying to restate her BC health coverage. This long, urgent conversation is captured below:

Cut off/ shut off,
from social displacement.
requesting in a an office full of

desperate/ disapparent needs,
outside of other agencies.

Wiping busy noses in between
wiping your own,
not for day care germs, but
germane daily care.
How do I account for subversive action
under the molding and scolding of CYC?
Scratched on a piece of paper on the back of her debt,
is the number to get a person to get to answer a question.
Is this political, feminist or CYC?
It's immediate need.
(Little)

Although practice in the realm of child, youth and family care is never neutral, naming one's intentions as praxis orientated makes explicit the political motivation within our work. When I asked Newman, for example, if CYC and political work were separate entities, he immediately replied:

> *Oh, absolutely not, that's such an exclusionary kind of perspective, its like trying to operate a vehicle without tires, sure you can rev your engine but where are you going to go? [laughter] It's not following the principle of the ecological model and the systems; everything we do is political. We learnt that, that's a no-brainer. That's beyond a proposal or premise it's a reality, you know...through inaction we are fully accountable to that- perpetuating the state conditions that create the issues that youth and children face. And you know it's hard for me to understand actually. I see it as a missing chunk, a really big chunk.*

Making a feminist ideology come to life, to consume the "big chunk", however, comes with its own risks and rejections. Teya, for example, states:

> *I think, for me being political and in the context of the word feminism or in terms of feminist practice means that there is a certain understanding or certain knowledge that there are going to be people who don't really agree and who will actually fundamentally disagree, so there's that chance that I'm going to have to speak up, back up what I say and possibly do things that are going to offend people or upset people and I think about that in a political, I mean, then I can go into the radical, right? I see being political as taking chances at times, because it is about going, standing up for what I believe in and knowing that sometimes I might stand by myself for a little while, or stand with few people and sometimes*

> *no one, you know, and it might piss people off, and I either go home with my tail between my legs.*

An example that she shared with me was being invited to speak to city hall on issues of sustainable, affordable housing, and she chose one of her younger, solo mothers to speak instead. If this is the case that creative and political means of "practice" can be a daily endeavor, then where did these consultants come to see this as an integral part of their practice? Where, in fact, did I? How did we, as CYC practitioners, sustain feminist action and identities when such actions and identities are often challenged and resisted? This brings us to the next chapter: resistance to feminism.

Chapter Eight

Resistance to Feminism

The first thing a revolutionary has to know:
don't get caught

(Dykewoman, 1995, p.51)

When I first broached my topic of feminism in CYC, there was one immediate question asked: "I'm not a feminist, but I espouse many feminist values, can I be included?" Well, the answer was effectively no. Although this may seem to be unnecessarily harsh, it was with intention that I chose people who explicitly took up the identity qualifier of feminist. Although an entire thesis could be devoted to why people *do not* chose to identify as feminist, with initial hunches that women of color, Aboriginal women, differently abled women and other individuals historically marginalized by woman's liberation movements do not see "it", however "it" is defined, as priority in their struggle (Bailey, 1997; Currie, 1999; Friedman, 1995; Gergen, 2001). Gergen (2001) for example, states:

> The critical view suggests that this woman-story has most often been told by certain kinds of feminist-white, heterosexual, healthy, middle-aged, middle-class academic women. It is not the single story for all women- those who differ in color, class, age, physical ability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity claims. (p.27)

This I honour. As a white, able bodied and educated woman, I do not intend to colonize other women with what I see as the so-called right path to liberation. At the same time, it struck me that there were so many people willing to narrate their struggles with sexism and other oppressions and yet not willing or choosing to take up the term of "feminist" as

a primary identity qualifier. Crow (2000) speaks to this, stating: "[as] a result of more than 30 years of '2nd wave' feminism is a comfortable cushion of freedom; but that cushion also mutes and distances the struggles that created those freedoms" (p.1). As such, while some people are not convinced that feminism is still needed, they are still working within oppressive structures. Newman shared my confusion about why people do not take up the term, stating:

> *A lot of people in the field do not identify as feminist, and I think it really impacts the way we do our work. Cause I know they're caring, I know I'm caring, and I know we're both working for youth, but we're coming at it from different angles.*

Given that feminist is still the "f-word" in many circles, I have intentionally chosen individuals who publicly take up the identity of feminist, because it is a risky label in some contexts.

For myself, the context that speaks most loudly is in the classroom, both as a student and an instructor. As a student, claiming feminist space in a child and youth care climate was onerous at best, and hostile at worst. When challenged to cite a specific example of this, I must be honest in saying that I struggled to articulate my response. Although I detail a few specific instances further on in this chapter, I am hyper aware of not pointing fingers. When reviewing my personal journals from my time as an undergraduate, there was a clear thread of frustration, similar to Teya's concept about "silent rage". When I raised my hand to question the patriarchal roots of theoretical conceptions and counseling practices, I could see some students rolling their eyes, and in some cases, made instructors visibly nervous. My journals speak of feeling isolated, misunderstood and too radical. I even contemplated leaving the program. This passage is not meant to romanticize developmental angst, rather to illustrate the dissonance I spoke

to at the beginning of this inquiry. My experience as a feminist student in CYC has, without a doubt, impacted my role as an instructor. As an instructor, I am acutely aware of how oppressive language further marginalizes students who fall outside the status quo and attempt to always be cognizant of the language I am using. Much like Nelson (1992)

> I've learned something about jargon. I thought I had really shied away from overusing literary pet words. But I've been startled and horrified of late to find that I've internalized some concepts in jargon, and that the words (jargon) I use to express them no longer strike me as jargon, but rather as the clearest way to express what I'm thinking about in order to be understood. But such is not the case in broader audiences with whom I wished to communicate when I entered the institution in the first place. Conformity with it, though, was not supposed to happen. I wonder at the great assimilating power of Discipline, Academia, which I both aspire and resist. (Paradox again?) And how the doctoral examination process (or my dealing with it) has diminished my resistance and groomed my conformity. (p.79)

Have I fallen prey to feminist and/or academic jargon replacing sincere speech? I am also acutely aware of the challenge of not emulating patriarchal team teaching with male instructors. The instructor I teach with right now, for example, and I have lengthy conversations about how much space I am claiming, how much space he is taking and what students might think of our gendered interactions. At the same time, however, I am aware of how resistant[19] some students are to shaking up the concepts of gender. Parallel to Donadey's (2002) discussion of negotiating tensions in the classroom regarding

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[19] A wise instructor once told me that resistance was not "real"; it was a label attached to clients who our skill level could not reach. For the purposes of this inquiry, however, "resistance" refers to claims of "this is too hard/weird" or "what does this have to do with CYC"?

racialized experiences, there is an insistence that "things are equal now". Partly fueling this is the choice of feminist writings included in the syllabus, which either ignore the struggle inherent in anti-oppressive work (see, for example, Walters et al., 1999) or explicitly comment, for example, "some feminist therapists may become overzealous and in subtle ways impose their values on clients" (Corey, 2005, p.372).

Of course, the classroom does not exist in isolation of the larger greater social structure(s). The theories that frame this inquiry are clear in that pockets of culture are not neutral, but to use Hoskins' term, cultural repositories (Little & Hoskins, 2005). Although we speak of Bronfenbrener's ecological system, we do not often talk about how the meaning constructed in each system is translated into others. For example, in a North American context, homophobia plays out both in implicit and explicit ways linked to macro discourses. Yet, that meaning and experience is felt at the micro system. As such, taking up the identity of feminist is fraught with connotations linked in macro discourses of ideology and media. There is a strong link between resistance to feminism and it's association with lesbianism, and consultants were explicit about this barrier. For example, Penelope reflected:

> *It's because they're afraid of that word [feminism], probably, people are afraid to be labeled, of you know, feminist, she's a lesbian. It covers a whole range of how women feel about themselves.*

Teya also commented on this theme, stating:

> *I think there's an assumption that all feminists are lesbian- man- hating you know, we can go back to all those labeling ways, and I remember that book Feminist Pedagogy, which was we had in the second year as well that was never discussed in class, but it was kind of this scary little book that people, kind of shook when they held in their hands [laughter]?*

In fact, I also had *Feminist Pedagogy* (Brisken, 1999) for a course text, and when discussion was introduced to the book, a woman raised her hand and said: "to me, this sounds like it was written by an angry lesbian", and there was no intervention on part of the instructor, just a sea of nodding heads. The quick and "natural" leap from feminism to lesbianism is in part, fueled by famous slogans such as Ti Grace Atkinson's "feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice" (Crow, 2000, p.5)[20], but also greatly informed by homophobia. It is very interesting to me that people associate the two terms: feminist and lesbian, as synonymous, when many second wave, lesbian feminist writers (The Furies, Abbott & Love, Mae Brown, Bunch; see Crow for discussion, 2000, and Douglas, 1990) felt *left out* of the feminist movement.

Newman talked elsewhere about the homophobia associated with men challenging traditional male roles, but also discussed the limitation of the term as restrictive, as opposed to prescriptive. He states:

> *I could see people stopping at the term [feminism]. I could see it because it's evolved to a new level right? It's unfortunate that some people get stuck on the term right? I don't get stuck on it, because at some point in time, we have to question, I mean, we are questioning gender flat out right? And I can see some people not identifying [as feminists] because maybe it holds them back, using that label to maybe the next level of involvement, I don't know, I'm not speaking for them but I'm fine with that, you know, I don't feel threatened by that, I guess, in any way, shape or form, and I define it [feminism] pretty openly you know.*

When I deliberated on this quote, I remember thinking: this should sound an alarm, an alarm that calls attention to the limitations of grasping tight to an "out dated" term. There are many people, students, colleagues, strangers at protests, who have passionately claimed, "I'm a humanist!" And, yet, just as people physically recoil at the word "feminist", this is my same reaction to its proposed replacement, which of course falls

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[20] According to Crow's research, this quote was originally delivered differently, however, this version of the slogan was taken up.

prey to dichotomous thinking and conceptualizing. I have struggled to find the space between, and part of that struggle lies in my own reluctance to give the word up, lest I give up a piece of my identity that is socially recognizable. If I am not a feminist, how will people know what I am and what I stand for? In many respects, what Newman is referring to is action. Yet, I need language to explain such action. What language do I default to when asked to explicate my claims, beliefs and theories? Despite the claim Atkinson made that "women must, in a sense, commit [definitional] suicide" (Crow, 2000, p.12), I am reluctant to give up its comfort.

Others intentionally resist the term based on power. Newman speaks to his male identified friends:

> *I've a lot of friends who are males who identify as feminist or allies, for sure, if they didn't I can understand some thinking that is further like colonization and co-opting somebody else's, you know. I do know some men who don't identify, who fully embody feminist principals but don't use that term because they feel its taking more [power/male dominated space] again, so I can understand that.*

For Teya, who works with adolescent girls, commented on her clients' reactions to feminism

> *I see being a single mother being on their own, still going to school and they're doing it their way, and they're somewhat feminists as well, they just may not have that identity or that desire, but they might and they might not identify that way but they definitely do things where I can see being a feminist, like standing up for themselves, as single women, as single mothers, getting on the bus and saying, no, I'm not going to fold my stroller up, my baby's sleeping, I'm going to leave my baby in the stroller, and those kinds of little things that where they're learning to be assertive and to speak out about what it is like from their experience.*

What comes to mind when thinking of her conversation runs parallel to the resurgence of "girl power" in the nineties? Young women, to a large extent are learning about gender through media, not second wave texts. In fact, they are creating their own texts in the

most postmodern sense: zines, websites, Rrrt Girls movements [sic], and bands. I believe that these creative forms of resistance are part of the evolution of feminism, but my question is do we recognize them as such? Driscoll (1999) also asks this question: "I want to ask…whether girl power is feminist. Is it a feminist analysis of popular culture, or itself feminist popular culture?" (p.174). For myself, I struggle with the distinction between commodifcation of feminism (see, for example, Currie (1994) for a parallel argument to environmentalism and Wald's (1998) discussion of the Spice Girls,) and embodied, public feminist acts. In a sense, there is also a resistance that runs horizontally between generations of women, and Bellafante (1998) comments: "It's not surprising that Old Guard feminists, surveying their legacy, are dismayed by what they see" (p.54).

There is also resistance not only to the label, but the action and awareness that comes parallel to it. For example, Alice Walker (as quoted in Rezabowich, 2001) reflected, "activism is my rent for living on this planet". When I brought that quote to a discussion with Newman, his reaction was:

> *What I hear from that is there's the responsibility to not be passive in the process, I totally relate to that cause it all boils down to awareness and if a person doesn't have awareness of something, how can they be accountable to the action? But, that's the double edged sword of becoming an activist and pursuing the awareness is accountability and it's painful at times because it can be very self sacrificing and martyring, like we inevitably take the easier path, ignorance is bliss, right? The easiest path is to be ignorant and to not open oneself up to what's happening in the world and to live a very luxurious privileged life or just serving our own needs, right?*

The inconvenience of speaking out, the risk of being labeled "radical" or a "troublemaker" are certainly barriers, and Newman further comments that *"usually it comes down to convenience, right? In a lot of what we've done in the world is nasty, is to do with our own convenience and so it's inconvenient to be an activist [laughter]".*

Furthermore, all my consultants held more than one job (either two outside the home, or full time work and co-parenting). Although much of our activism is channeled through our work places, this leaves little time or energy for extra efforts:

> *There was that protest, the women's walk out? And I don't think that was very well attended, why is that? Is that fear? Is that because we are afraid or is it that we're too busy? I think sometimes for me I'm too busy, but then really, where are my passions or my values? There are many people who want to do something, actually make a protest happen [Teya].*

I, too, wonder where my passion lies and why this does not always translate to practice outside my work realm. As an example, for many years I worked nights and could not attend the local "Take back the night" marches. This first one I had attended was a very powerful, moving experience on many levels. This not only included linking arms with fellow women, drying each other's tears, but walking in solidarity as a very large man stood on a street corner with his middle finger sending a clear message for what he thought we were doing. But he could not stop us; he dare not stop us. Yet, the power of solidarity is often overwhelming, and at times, I needed to retreat to a place of safety and solitude. My current struggle, however, is that I have retreated so far, at times, I am afraid to venture forth. Hence, resistance is not always apathy, but rather can be construed as re-evaluation. As has been stated previously, this process of being feminist, much like the research itself, is a dialectical process between action, performance and analysis. My feminist action and identity needs periods of introspection and reconceptualizing. This now brings us to the thresh hold of this thesis – the evolution of the feminist struggle.

Chapter Nine

Evolution of the Struggle

I live with sister dissonance,
She roughly holds my hand.
Paltry words are just that-
Nothing more than words,
Pale from repetition.
Clichés joined to metaphor
And metaphor clinging to parable-
Even under words,
A world to choose from,
We are constrained,
Restrained from saying what
We need
We want
In pure honesty-
All voice is stained with verse.
(Little)

hooks (2000) reflects on the struggle to keep personal passion alive in the face of macro discourses that dictate immediate revolutionary change, or at least, immediate personal satisfaction:

> New social orders are established gradually. This is hard for individuals in the United States [and, I would argue, Canada] to accept. We have either been socialized to believe that revolutions are always characterized by extreme violence between the oppressed and their oppressors or that revolutions happen quickly. We have also been taught to crave immediate gratification of our desires and swift responses to our demands. Like every other liberation movement in this society, feminism has suffered because these attitudes keep participants from forming the kind of commitment to protracted struggle that makes revolution

> possible. As a consequence, feminist movement has not sustained its revolutionary momentum. It has been a successful rebellion. (p.161)

And this thesis has been no revolution, but I hope it is a successful rebellion. Indeed, it is a struggle, and as Dr. Marie Hoskins has reflected, struggle keeps people connected. The tension, however, lies in how much struggle people can endure, collectively or individually, and the ultimate question lies in if this struggle can be transcended. This far, the reader has been privy to a variety of feminist musings: from where we have come in the field and the legacy it bestowed to us, to my consultants reflecting on moving as feminists in the words today, to my own process amongst all this. But where does that leave us? Where is feminism going? If the last explicit mention of feminism in CYC publications was 1992, and deathly silence since, does a "resurrection" or whisper of feminism in 2005 come to be interpreted as the death knell? Newman is optimistic about what may unfold:

> *I feel like we're on the edge of an evolvement as a species. That's exciting, it's exciting to watch our evolvements happening on a spiritual, cognitive, conscious level [rather] than a physical level. There's some very dark forces on the planet, patriarchy is one face of it, but its something much bigger and we're growing in our ability to name it. I'm very inspired by all this stuff that's erupting lately. Different movies, different stories, different people standing up and speaking out to name this force. I feel like we're on the edge of massive change. I don't think its going to be pretty because those with power are going to want to keep it and you can call it revolution, whatever, we haven't really named it. I feel excited and hopeful in that I'm contributing to it and trying to name it.*

To return to Friere (2003), "the hoped-for is not attained by dint of raw hoping" (p.9), and all of my consultants reflected on their own processes of hope, whether that be through obtaining further education congruent with their aspirations or involvement with community projects aimed toward eliminating social inequality. Consultants clearly outlined their dedication to praxis, and reflected on the daily struggle they engaged in to

attain the hope they describe. This does not mean that they or I are romantic feminist versions of Don Quixote fighting the patriarchal windmills. Indeed, there is still a sense of needing to "let go" in the process of moving forward. Newman describes this evolutionary movement thusly:

> *There is a total grieving to it. There's a chaos to not knowing where we are. Yeah, total grieving to it, the confusion, and frustrations and sometimes the feeling of emptiness, or void, lacking clarity of where to go, and where to move and the scariness of the unknown.*

My own evolution as a feminist in this process has, indeed, led me into a state of the unknown, of questioning where to move to next. Part of me is concurrently remiss and saddened at the prospect of writing a "dear John" letter to feminism and hopeful that such a letter would mean we have surpassed living in oppressive times. As Bechdel (2003) says tongue in cheek: "lately, the young activists I meet seem to have cut their teeth organizing gay-straight alliances in the day-care centers. And many of them have moved beyond the need for even categories 'gay' and 'straight'. I've reluctantly come to accept that the whole point of a liberation movement, after all, is to render itself obsolete" (p.4). That said, we are not truly free, are we, regardless of what we title the liberatory movement. In fact, Newman believes that such titles will fall to the wayside because there is a root to all oppressive structures, and that root is violence:

> *It doesn't matter what you're talking about, if you're talking about war, poverty, or violence or the WTO, oppression or environmental destruction, racism – its all the same thing. Its all the same dynamic, its violence, this cult of violence, you can call it an energy force of violence. So, I'm stopped – this feminism, racism, its all the same thing, its all the same dynamic. So the terms are going to fall at some point, fall to the side, all these separate names for all these isms, including feminism, that term is going to fall to the side. I don't think it should every be forgotten, for sure, but at some point, there will be another term that is more inclusive of all the different isms. I would say violence is the common denominator, that is what I have concluded.*

Although I do not disagree that violence crosses the spectrum of oppression, I also understand that it was through feminists that I came to visit the many domains that included and pushed beyond the concept of patriarchy. It was through these feminist characters (some fictional, some not) that I came to understand issues of capitalism (Mies, 1986; Klein, 1999), global issues for women (Nussbaum, 2000) and racism (hooks, 1994, Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981; Morrison, 1988), Aboriginal realities (Maracle, 1996), the violence of meat (Adams, 1993), subjective and poetic renderings of experience (Sullivan, 1989), psychology (Caplan, 1985; Pinkola Estes, 1992) to name a few. It was through the gateway of learning about sexism that my mind was opened to learning about multiple oppressions. I have always *felt* myself a feminist, well, at least since age five, and the Montreal Massacre brought the whole crashing patriarchal reality down at age fifteen. It was through sexism that I understood that we are not all afforded equal rights, and it was through coming out as Queer that I learned the harder lesson that not all women are discriminated against equally – hets worth more than dykes, bi's despised by dykes, and the oppression goes on, fuelled by a competitive macro culture and divisive identity politics. When I spoke to hanging my feminist hat up early in this dialogue, it was partly due to division I saw and felt amongst my Queer and feminist community. For example, a family friend and professional mentor and myself had a long talk about butch[21] lesbians transitioning to male. Her attitude was that of betrayal, but in retrospect, mine was of constrained emancipation. Both of us viewed this issue from feminist perspectives, yet both saw each other's interpretation as wrong. Once again, I was reminded that heralding under one banner does not guarantee solidarity. I was also

[21] The topic of Butch (and Femme) is far outside the scope of this thesis, but a historical standpoint of Butch/Femme can be taken up further by the reader in Lapovsky Kennedy & Davies (1993).

reminded that others' fluidity, in this case, transitioning Butches, challenges the familiar static of the personal. Our conversation was less about the Butch lesbians, but about ourselves as Femmes. Could you still be a Femme if all the Butch dykes became trans men? Likewise, women and men evolving past the label of feminist create panic for those who cannot or will not let go of the label. But, it is also the understanding that because our allies are diverse, I can also operate within that multiplicity of identities. My evolution is akin to Teya, who told me:

> *I think it is a continual progression because I'm learning more and more and as I consciously studied feminism in school, in different perspective, learning about first wave, and second wave and third wave, and then, coming into a place where I'm moving away from boxing people in, or boxing identities, or understanding that we can identify in a million different ways.*

Part of this "continual progression" is acknowledging the multiple incongruencies and contradictions within our selves, but also linking with other struggles. Teya reflects:

> *Separated, divided we fall, right? And so I think it's about starting to have conversations, and connecting people up – I think networking is huge in this community.*

Penelope supports this, who comments:

> *The advantage of joining forces with other kinds of social issues, like gay rights and the environment, certainly human rights kind of issues. That's what it is about, changing the world.*

There is a challenge of cross movement intersectionality, brought forth by Yeatman (1994):

> These movements [women's movement, peace movement, youth movements, and so forth] are themselves flexible networks of language games rather than precisely bounded, heirachally integrated organized presence. They are subject to an internal politics of multiple and conflicting representations of why they exist,

> what it is that they should do, and how they should operate. Perhaps more significantly, a good deal of the movement activity is submerged within the common sense of everyday life. This permits dissenting constructions of the movement's politics to assume peaceful coexistence in the form of different and plural ways of conducting everyday life. (p.114)

Between the four of us, I can identify a broad range of advocacy in women's rights (including housing, single parenting, day care, reproductive health, lesbian health), environmental and anti-capitalistic issues (including gifting, creative recycling, DIY production ranging from menstrual pads, soap, organic gardening to protesting), animal rights (vegetarianism), and clients' rights (taking clients to case meetings and forming radical youth groups), parenting indigo children or respite parenting. Very impressive for four busy people. We are not fixated on gender and sexism as the sole focus of our energy, but it is all connected. Newman offers a beautiful metaphor in relation to this:

> *You know, mushrooms in the forest...are actually fruits of a massive, massive being that's underneath the ground. They're just discovering that a mushroom can be kilometers in length. These little tentacles go out and the mushrooms come up as the fruit. I see us as human beings as the same thing, we're each fruits of a force, of a being, and we're unique because we have a particular consciousness in the world. So, I'm trying to change myself, too, because I'm part of that massive being. I feel like the work I do in myself can directly impact the world. As a species, we're all connected that way- we kind of spiral up and evolve together.*

As feminist CYC practitioners, we are also evolving together. As my consultants have reflected, this personal evolution is a product of conversation, questioning and the explicit naming of oneself amidst the structures we work, live and play in.

Implications for Child and Youth Care Practice

Thus far, I have addressed the evolutions and contributions of my consultants, which I hope the reader will agree are concurrently inspiring and challenging. But what of the greater context of child and youth care education and practice? As I mentioned in the literature review, explicit feminist language has appeared, and subsequently disappeared, from the conventional child and youth care journals. At the same time, there is research being conducted that focuses on the gendered and/ or racialized experiences of girls (see for example, Artz, 1998; Hoskins & Mathieson, 2004; Lee & DeFinney, 2005; and Little and Hoskins, in press). What does this mean for contemporary feminist child and youth care work? Again, I return to the question of language and identity – are contemporary feminists calling their work something else? Or is the focus of their work more concerned with alternate, primary identity qualifiers? An example of this would be my tendering an invitation to an Aboriginal colleague to participate in this thesis as a consultant. Her response was essentially that "feminist" was not her primary identity qualifier. Although beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to examine the evolution of what we may call the "post feminists" and their relationship to research, practice and education. It would also be interesting to examine women who take up the term feminist second or even lastly to their identification as lesbian, Queer, working class, and so forth. There is also an increased attention to the role of men in CYC (McElwee, Jackson, Cameron, & McKenna-McElwee, 2003), which I would argue could not have been possible without the historical examination of the role of women in CYC. This is brought about questions about the recruitment and retention of males in a female

saturated field. What is fails to address, however, is how female dominated[22] reflects a particular version of female and so-called appropriate practice. Clearly, gender remains a salient issue for all of us involved in the realm of CYC, whether that is direct practice or structural work such as policy. At the same time, how we are gendered as CYC practitioners and how we resist or embrace such remains an uncharted site of inquiry.

What I have learned from my consultants and my own process through this thesis is that feminism is a site of multiple interpretations and performances. I recognize that a weakness to this inquiry is that my consultants held a fairly homogenous view of feminism that encapsulated linking social struggles, personal and collective actions, and a very privileged version of the concept of choice. At the same time, this inquiry provided space in which to articulate personal visions of feminism as they relate to practice. This was personally cathartic for me and well as professionally applicable. For example, by engaging in conversations with consultants, we co-constructed feminist space that felt respectful and hopeful. Retrospectively, I regret not bringing together my consultants around my own kitchen table to engage. Given my own experience as a lone squeaky wheel, it might have proved more fruitful for us to collectively dialogue. By separating the consultants, I inadvertently contributed to the stereotype of the isolated, radical feminist. Another regret is rendering my consultants invisible by using pseudonyms. Although this, theoretically, allowed for less self censorship, I also acknowledge their expertise as feminist child and youth care workers, yet I am the only one to publicly gain recognition for such expertise.

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[22] Dominated in this context does not imply that the power balance in CYC favours women as "dominators". On the contrary, what this term reflects is that front line practitioners, CYC undergraduate and MA students are predominantly female.

What continues to be vexing, however, is that the dissonance I referred to in the introduction has not entirely quelled. In reflecting on my process through this thesis, I have given thought to the parallels between feminism as a social movement and the profession of child and youth care. Clearly, each wave of feminism can be critiqued for its limitations and applauded for its foresight and initiatives. An example cited in this thesis was North America's second wave marginalization of Queer women. Likewise, child and youth care has evolved as a profession, although it has not been referred to as waves. What I deem the first wave of child and youth care, despite its intention to better the lives of children, youth and families, has also been the target of critique[23], but not theoretically or densely enough, in my opinion. Perhaps the idea that my dissonance has not completely dissolved reflects the energy that is required to participate in the next wave of child and youth care practice, or as I discussed previously and elaborate below, reflective of leaving the field. As research and pedagogy shift from singular selves to socially embedded intersections, I hope to see the field acknowledge the multiplicities, and specifically, the complexities of practicing in a gendered, racialized and heterosexist society. This intersectionality must include other disciplines, just as feminist movements in North America have moved from involuted entities to allied efforts.

Of course, the pessimist in me is also wary of heralding the next wave of feminism or child and youth care. Like any Master's student, I wonder if this writing will simply collect dust in the bottom of a university library basement. As I begin to prepare for PhD work, I find myself looking further away from Child and Youth Care to programs that express an explicit anti-oppressive stance toward practice, research and pedagogy. I am attracted to programs that have taken time to critically assess their canons

[23] An excellent example of critique is Skott-Myhre (2005)

of work and are open to the next theoretical and clinical wave. Perhaps the unfolding wave of child and youth care will begin to do this, especially with post-colonial methodologies. In the meantime, this examination of feminism, I believe, has expressed that issues of power, sexism, and silence are still conditions that must be overcome in the field. My consultants have talked about strategic practice, but structural changes at the training level might help alleviate isolated strategies. For example, discussion of the gendered and racialized nature of child and youth care would assist undergraduate students to envision a child and youth care future that did not inadvertently replicate such oppression. Like any social activist, I wonder at times, not "so what" but "why bother". I would like to think this inquiry prompts questions of identity, praxis and action, but cannot be assured of such. I wonder if child and youth care can embrace feminism, or if its feminists who are embracing and tweaking child and youth care. Regardless, this inquiry brings forth four feminist voices that I see as valuable and poignant in reflecting on child and youth care practice.

Summary

As I began to conclude this work, it was announced that a serial killer has been operating in the greater Edmonton area, targeting sex trade workers and other vulnerable women. It saddens me that every leg of my feminist journey seems punctuated by highly publicized atrocities against women. Much like the metaphorical signs I referred to earlier in this thesis, I see these events as messages and reminders that I must continue to work to end oppression. I also see these as reminders of why I call myself a feminist – so long as violence is explicitly gendered, I must be explicit in what I name myself. What has also been made explicit is the dissonance I referred to in the introductory chapter. I

feel that the mere completion of this thesis quells some of the dissonance, yet such dissonance propels my continuous reflexivity as a feminist practitioner. My consultants speak to the energy expanded on a daily basis countering injustice and the stereotypes that come with being explicit about their identity as feminists. In many respects, I leave this endeavor with renewed hope despite the continued patriarchal oppression. This is due to massive changes in my own life and how the many transitions have been guided by the resiliency demonstrated by my consultants. I leave this inquiry with a new and articulate conception of myself, but I also leave with new metaphors to guide my future inquiries. Just as I spoke to the brass wind chime earlier on in this inquiry, Newman left me another image with which to view my work, being and meaning as a feminist:

> *It's the journey, and feminism, you used the word social action, I like that. [Feminism] is another face of it. Words just don't sum it up. I like the metaphor of a multifaceted diamond. You look at one side and it shows a different sheen and a different color, a different face of something that's incredibly complex.*

The process of studying feminism and identity is complex, and I have offered the reader one sheen with which to view it. I now trust this process to produce new sheens, new colors and new ways of discussing feminism.

Epilogue /

The Discovery

do not imagine that the exploration
ends, that she has yielded all her mystery
or that the map you hold
cancels further discovery

I can tell you her uncovering takes years
takes centuries, and when you find her naked
look again,
admit there is something else you cannot name,
a veil, a coating just above the flesh
which you cannot remove by your mere wish

when you see the land naked, look again
(burn your maps, that is not what I mean),
I mean the moment when it seems most plain
is the moment when you must begin again

(MacEwen, 1989, p. 163)

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